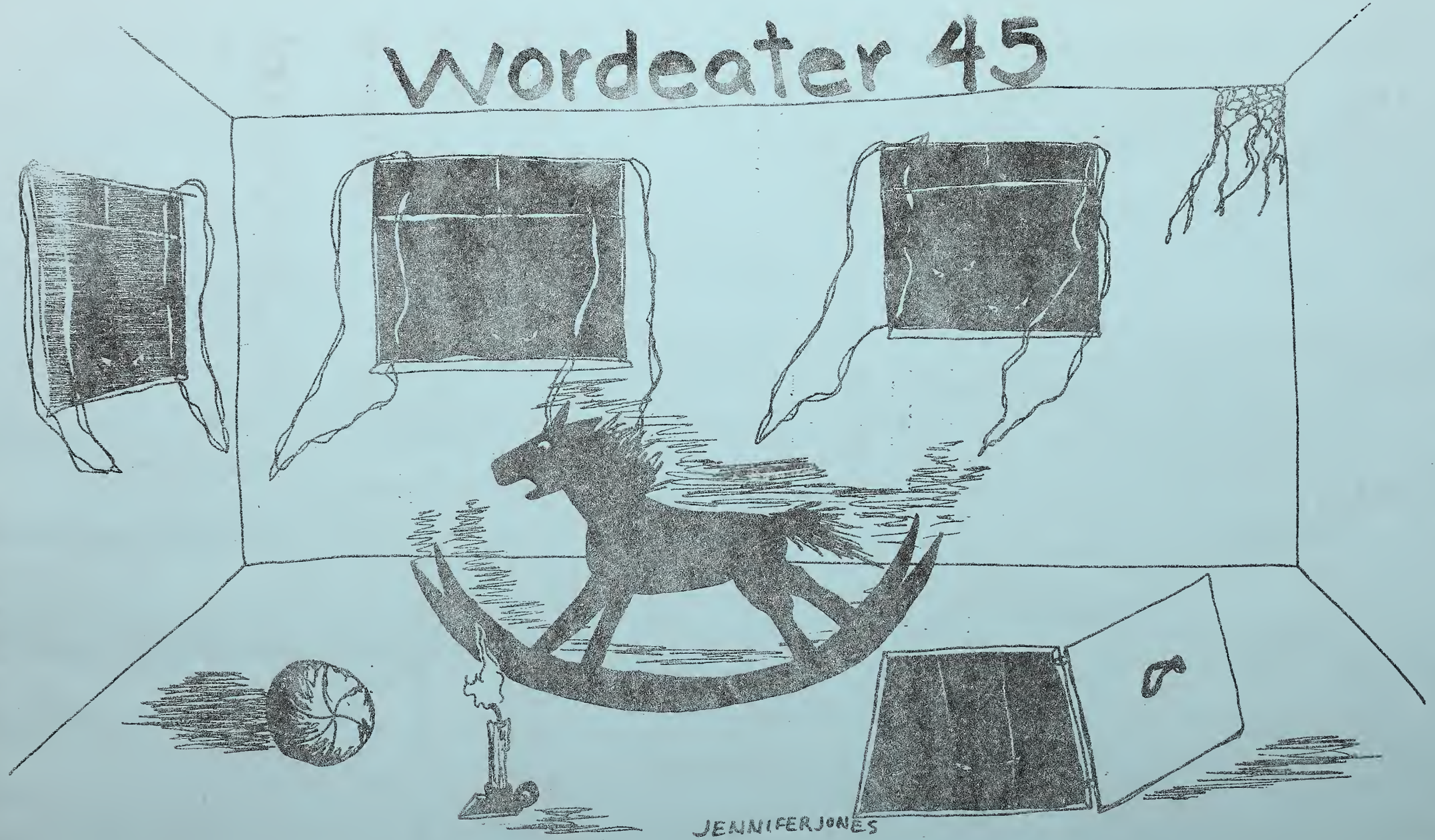
Wordeater 45



Wordeater 45 Staff

To get a submission printed in this issue, three of the people at the right had to vote for acceptance. For the award winners, only John Stobart (WORDEATER advisor) is responsible.

Judy Belfield
Steve Faron
Dave O'Brien
Anita Rutkowski
Charles Weatherford

AWARDS

- **PROSE** $25 - Anita Rutkowski
- **POETRY** $25 - Pat Roemer
- **COVERS** $20 - Jennifer Jones

NEXT THREE DEADLINES:

December 12, 1983
February 10, 1984
April 13, 1984

Manuscripts or cover designs for WORDEATER 46 must be submitted to John Stobart in room C-1069 by

December 12, 1983

Manuscripts will not be returned, and SHOULD BE TYPED.

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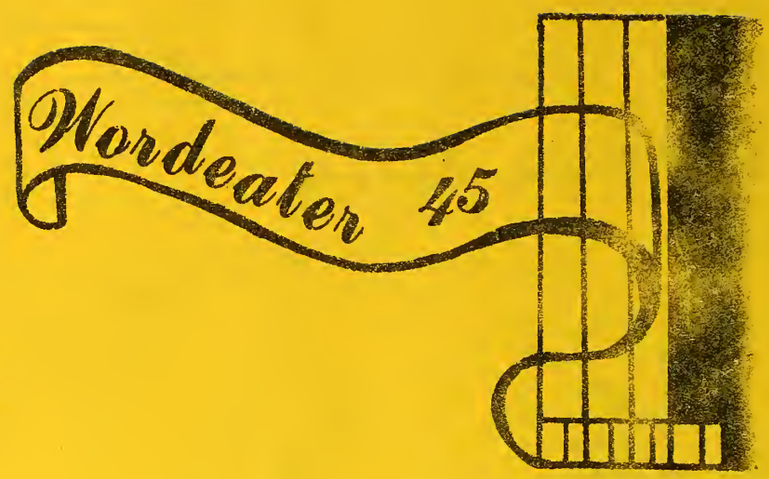

Susan Zupancic

NO MICROWAVE

I don't need no microwave
Don't want to fry my cat
I don't need no microwave
Don't think that is where it's at
Know I'd zap my daddy's pacemaker
Got a baby, I'd probly bake her
I don't want no microwave
Ma's got a
I don't need no microwave

****

Judy Belfield

TO RICHARD GERE

I think
you're probably
just another flash in the pan.
Nevertheless,
howja like
to make some sparks
in my skillet?

****

Stacy Biedermann

IMPRISONMENT

Release me
Let me go
I need to
To break
If only
Let me
I need

be free
this
for a
escape!
a chance

sheltered
day
to get

world I
away.

live in

****

Stacy Biedermann

BEING BALD AND LOVING EVERY MINUTE OF IT

If I had one wish, it would be for everyone to be bald. Believe it or not, it would be fantastic. Sit and think about it for a while. Think of the good points, the bad points, everything.

The one thing we'd save would be money. Think of all the "things" we use on our hair. For instance: comb, brush, blow dryer, curling iron, hair spray. Then we have shampoo, conditioner, and finishing rinse. Ladies get ready, no more bobby pins, head bands, hair nets, wigs, combs, barrettes, cuts, bleaches, streaks, and perms. Everyone would be natural! Never again would people be ashamed of their loss of hair. The oupees, transplants, and wigs will be in the past. Skin would be in!

Besides saving money, we would als save time. Nor more washing and drying just stick the ole head under the showe towel dry, and go. Another thing we could all do would be sleep later! Gre

Oh, how I'd love it. Everyone wou be cleaner. The dandruff would disappe The lice would die. No more greasies zitz on our foreheads.

People will look more at our perso ality, rather than the fact that we ar a redhead, yellowhead, brownhead, bla head, or grayhead. The problems of being hated because of your greasy th hair will no longer be around. Every would be beautifully bald.

Think of the working world. Hair has a lot to do with it. If everyone

(continued)

was bald we would never find another hair in our soup. (well?) Waitresses would not have to wear hairnets and professional women will not have to tie back their hair.

Think about the people who are already bald. Yul Brynner seems to be doing pretty well; so does Telly Savalas. What people don't realize is that they are not naturally bald, they love being bald. They love it just as I would only if my wish came true.

If you wake up one morning and look out your window and see a bunch of reflecting heads, you know my wish came true. Why don't you help me with my wish and start the fad . . . get the shaver and shave away. Skin is in! Be beautifully bald!

****

Len Overcash

THE CHANGED MAN

He went under again, shut off from the sun and sky and cool air. He felt himself weakening. With his feet, he searched frantically for the ledge he knew must be beneath him, but wasn't. Without it to push against, he couldn't get back to the surface. He sank deeper into the watery darkness, slowly dissolving and becoming a part of the murky water of the stone quarry.

Roger Harmon always woke, sweating and feeling panic, at that exact moment in the nightmare. He never reached the flat limestone shore as he managed to do when it really happened. For some reason, the ledge wasn't there in the nightmare and he kept going down. Twenty years ago, if he hadn't been so exhausted, he could have walked to shore. The water was only four feet deep at that spot.

When he finally grabbed the gritty limestone shelf and began pulling himself out of the water, he listened for Kenny. Expecting to see him break the surface, tired and angry, screaming about being so stupid and almost drowning them both. But the water was calm, rippled only by his own movements and the gentle August wind that blew through the old, long-abandoned limestone quarry.

Roger glanced at his watch. Seven o'clock. Still early evening.

"Christ!" he muttered, "Now I'm having that dream in the daytime."

He pushed himself off the couch and went to the refrigerator for a beer. The last can rattled around in the crisper as he pulled it open. Roger frowned, suddenly realizing that he'd gone through more than a case here at home. Plus whatever he drank across the street at Bill's Bar. If the nightmare didn't stop soon, he'd go broke.

Roger pulled the tab and walked to the window in his third-floor studio apartment. He could look out over the sprawling city in which he'd lived all his life. He

Robert "Gap" Webb

WHAT DOES IT HAVE TO DO WITH ME?

Now, right now
I'm sitting in this room
Like everyone else
even though not on the same channel
Trying to be attentive to something
I think lacks anything of
interest to me.
I'm basically here, struggling to
survive this transition I'm present
engaged in.
Set backs, pent up, strung out
laid back, know all and couldn't
care much more to deal.
Now, I know I relate in this
sense of doing so
I know I can respond to
anything common to my experiences
still picking my mind, in a quest
to know
So what does all the seemly viable
conversation and encounters have to
do with me?
Writing is only stating questions.

****

hated it. As he hated much of his own life since that day twenty years ago. He considered himself a failure, barely making it through high school, flunking out of college, then Nam, and finally, his hasty and doomed marriage to Brenda. He was losing his two sons too. Three years of being with them only on weekends had cut through too many of the bindings that once held them together.

Roger had always kept the hope of reconciliation, but last week, Brenda had told him she was getting remarried. To a surgeon. A successful man.

Deep inside Roger knew he should have drowned that day; not Kenny. That's why the dream was recurring again.

Across the street, the neon light in the window of Bill's Bar went on. Tomorrow was Saturday, the weekend his two sons spent with him. He seldom drank when they were here. But the boy weren't here tonight. He quickly finished his beer and left.

Bill's Bar was an easy place to suspend time and get quietly drunk. No

(continued)

bands had ever played here, so there were no loud noises. Just a large color TV suspended in a corner over the bar.

Roger felt a gentle tap on his shoulder and turned to see Bob Larson, flaming red hair stylishly combed, smiling down at him.

"Drinking alone? Bad sign, Rog."

Roger shrugged as Bob slid into the stool beside him.

"One of those nights, huh?" Bob said.

Roger had known Bob for two years. They had lived in the same apartment complex. Bob was divorced too.

"Ex-wife trouble?" Bob inquired, ordering a glass of beer.

"Sorta," Roger said. "Not all, but some of it. She's getting . . . married again. To a surgeon with prestige and money."

"One of them successful men, right?"

"Yep. Well . . . " Roger paused. Though he didn't consider Larson an intimate friend, he felt a need to talk. "Did you ever wish that you could go back and change things? I mean things that affected your whole life?"

"Don't we all." Bob laughed. "Hell, if I could change anything, I'd be richer than sin right now."

"Not exactly," Roger said, chewing his lower lip. He didn't want this to sound as if he were certifiably crazy. "I mean a tragedy. The death of a close friend."

"Sure," Bob nodded. "I lost a good friend in Nam. But everybody's gotta die sometime."

"But what if you knew, truly knew, that . . . that someone died at the wrong time?"

Bob looked directly at Roger. "Well, I was told that when your time came, you went. No matter what. But I gotta agree, sometimes it seems wrong. Though there's nothing you can do about it."

"What if you could go back into the past, knowing what was going to happen, and could do something, anything, to change the outcome?" Roger asked.

"You'd change the world. History would be changing every second."

"Would you do it? Assuming it were somehow possible?"

Roger's heavy drinking the last few weeks puzzled and worried Bob. Could this be the reason that he wanted to change his past? Bob stalled by lighting a cigarette. "This is getting to be a pretty heavy conversation, Rog."

Roger drained his glass and motioned for another. "I suppose. But I can't help wondering."

"What would you change?" Bob asked.

After a moment, Roger said, "I'd go back twenty years and keep my best friend from drowning."

"You saw it happen?"

"Yep." Roger sighed. His chest and throat were constricting with the memory. He took a long swallow of beer. "We used to swim in this old stone quarry off 53, south of town. Hardly anybody knew about it. They all went to Newell Pool. But me 'n Kenny loved the place. Anyway . . one afternoon we got up on one of the highest ledges and jumped."

Bob kept silent.

"He shouldn'ta died, though," Roger went on. "He had it all goin for him. He was best in sports. And was real smart too. He taught me how to swim! I shudda been the one who drowned! Maybe it was because we were so poor and lived in a crummy trailer court!"

"Calm down," Bob soothed. "Look, I don't wanna sound like . . . hell, I don't care what I sound like. You need help. I know this great doctor . . . "

"A shrink! No thanks."

"Why not? If you need help, get help. Drinking yourself into a stupor every night won't do it," Bob said. "He helped me to accept my divorce. And to deal with my feelings. He can help you deal with this." He leaned closer. "You <u>can't</u> change the past, Rog, but you <u>can</u> get help in understanding and dealing with it. That's the key."

Roger rested on his elbows, drinking

"Believe it or not, Rog, but a lotta people think the same way you do. About changing the past, I mean. One guy in my group, his father died of a heart attack in the garage. Right after they'd had an argument. He was only nineteen, and he kept blaming himself for causing the death. One of his problems was that he couldn't go into that garage. No matter what. He simply could not enter the place. He moved a short time later, but could never get over the feeling of guilt. The Doc helped him deal with the guilt and then suggested he go back to his old house and go into that garage. Somehow, the guy pulled it off."

"It worked, huh?"

"Seems to," Bob said. "But the guy got help, Rog. He knew he couldn't do it alone. I'll give you the Doc's number."

At dawn, Roger awoke in a drenching sweat, clawing at the air. To calm his jangling nerves, he got himself a beer. He was glad that he'd remembered to get a six-pack before he left Bill's. Maybe drinking himself into a stupor every night wasn't the answer to his problem, as Bob said, but it was all he had.

The phone was ringing and Roger suddenly snapped awake. He had relaxed on the couch after a second beer, and had fallen asleep again.

"Hello," he said thickly into the mouthpiece.

"Roger?" Brenda asked.

"Yeh, it's me." His tongue felt as though it was covered with a cottony mold.

"Are you okay?" she asked seriously. "Are you drunk?"

(continued)

"No!" Roger answered, clearing his throat. "I was sleeping."

"You sound drunk," she told him.

Roger bit back the anger rising within him. He didn't answer but let the silence continue. Let her break it, he thought.

"I called about the boys," she said after a few more seconds.

"I'll pick them up . . ."

"No!" She interrupted. "We're going with Adam to Wisconsin. His parents invited us all up for the weekend."

"But . . . this is my weekend to keep them!"

"Sorry. Adam's outside waiting in the car," Brenda said. "I tried to call you last night. I stopped calling at midnight."

"I don't hang around waiting for you to call, Breada," Roger said sarcastically. "Look, I want the boys this weekend. Go without them."

"Nope. Everything's packed and they're in the car already. Frankly, Roger, the boys told me that they get bored to death in that tiny apartment. They like to ride their bikes and be with kids their own age. You know how it is."

"I can't say that I do, Brenda. I really can't."

"Well, maybe next weekend."

"I'm working the next three Saturdays. You know that. My rights are being violated. I have custody on weekends, remember!"

"So, sue me."

"Thanks for nothing."

"I tried to call," she said. "Tell you what. You give me the number of that bar where you spend so much time, and I'll call there first. Okay?"

"You're turning them against me. I know it."

"You are drunk, aren't you? Maybe it's better that you're not getting them this weekend if you're gonna start that again. I don't want to worry about your drinking any more."

"I'm not drunk! And I don't drink when the boys are with me!"

"Because you know what will happen if you do! Goodbye."

The line went dead.

Dever's Trailer Park, where Roger had lived for so many years, had been bulldozed away and a growth of short trees and weeds covered most of the two acres, but an equally low-classed used car lot claimed the corner nearest the highway. The gravel trucks still labored heavily in and out of the enormously deep stone quarry across Ill. 53.

Despite his resistance, the feelings were released. The past was still vivid. Images danced and ran together as the memories flooded his mind. The dilapidated, dull, silver trailer that was his home, his mother, who he truly loved, but her whining tone drove him crazy, his father with complaints of arthritis and ulcers, or whatever illness was going around that kept him unemployed and permanently in front of the small black-and-white TV. He never took Roger anywhere, not fishing, or swimming, or to a basketball game. He just sat in that crusty, sagging armchair and gave his only child verbal lessons on honesty and hard work. Like on "Father Knows Best" or "Ozzie and Harriet." Even their deaths didn't affect him as much as Kenny's. Kenny Davis had been everything to him; best friend, confidante, and teacher. Almost a brother. They were so alike in appearance that people often got them mixed up. They were like twins somehow, having different parents, and lived in trailers parked side by side.

Roger glanced across Apple Hill Road at his battered blue Civic parked under an elm in the lot of Newel Park. It seemed safe to leave there for a while, so he tried to appear casual as he walked toward the small grove of oak trees. He would follow the path along the steep limestone banks of Newel Creek to the quarry. Though this route was the longest way, he and Kenny took it most often because of its illusion of wildness. It was still that way, except for the shingled roofs of a few new houses barely visible through the foliage. A distinct smell floated in the afternoon air around him. The odor of wildflowers, tall, fibrous weeds, and untouched soil. He remembered overturning rocks in the creek and watching the crayfish scoot away, stirring up the sediment along the bottom, and suddenly felt a little better, less gloomy.

Maybe he got lucky, for once, meeting Bob Larson last night and hearing about the man who had returned to that garage. Maybe it was what he needed to do too.

Roger thought, if I go into the stone quarry and face the past, maybe I'll come out a changed man. Maybe.

Suddenly it was there. At his right. A couple of acres that looked like a huge bite from the earth. The layers of limestone representing eons of time striped the sides unevenly, large areas had been blasted, creating ledges like steps around the sides of the box-like quarry. Sometime during its brief existence, water began filling it and the workers left, crossing the highway to start again. What they left behind, surrounded by gnarled trees and low, tenacious bushes, was an isolated paradise.

During the summers that the two of them swam here, they almost never had to share it with anyone else. That was the best thing about this place. But the isolation was also its biggest disadvantage because help had been so far away.

After climbing down the steep, rocky path, Roger stopped at the edge of the water and lit a cigarette. The surface was calm, rippled only by the gentle August wind, reflecting the clear, cloudless sky overhead. It looked inviting and he squatted and put his hand in. It was cool, as he remembered, almost too cool for swimming, but that too, had been part of the magic of this place--swimming until your teeth chattered, then sunning on one

(continued)

of the ledges to get warm again.

God, he thought, how we loved to come here.

Roger wished that he'd brought beer with him. After Brenda had called, he drank several more and fell asleep on the couch again. Now it was mid-afternoon, hot and humid even with the breeze, and time for another cold one to quench his thirst and growing need.

The water was tempting. Not having a swimsuit had never bothered him; he swam in his jockey shorts as a kid and would do it still. He stripped quickly and plunged in. The change was shocking. Roger came directly to the surface, his breath nearly chilled away, but he didn't go back to shore. This was just as he remembered.

A few minutes of awkward stroking quickly tired him and he let his feet sink and stood on the bottom. Something in Roger's memory clicked. This was the spot where he knew he would make it to shore--the spot in the dream. Except the dream had him out beyond the drop-off, not on the underwater shelf he was standing on. Looking up and slightly to his right, he could see the ledge that they had jumped from. He saw now why it had happened; the ledge was too much into the shallow portion and they couldn't possibly leap into the drop-off. Not together. Not with Kenny grabbing his arm and just jumping.

Roger walked to shore and pulled himself out of the water. Laying on the hard, uneven limestone, the sun warming and drying, he was overcome with sorrow. He felt sorry for himself and what he'd become, and sorry for Kenny Davis, but even worse, that he would be exactly the same person when he left here. Nothing could change the past; one of them had to drown that day and the other had to live with the guilt the rest of his life.

Warmed by the sun, he grew drowsy and closed his eyes. Suddenly he was on that ledge again with Kenny Davis standing beside him.

"C'mon, Rog, jump!" Kenny yelled in his ear.

"Listen, Kenny, we can't! Please listen!" Roger begged.

"Chicken!! Roger's a chicken! Kenny screamed out over the empty quarry.

Roger clung desperately to the face of the cliff, his fingers digging in between layers of rock. "You don't understand, Kenny! If we jump . . . if we jump, one of us will get killed. I know it!! God, Kenny, you got to listen to me!!"

"We can make it!" Kenny grinned, grabbing Roger's wrist. "Heck, I done it lotsa times."

"Not this time," Roger pleaded. "Not this time. Let's climb down!?"

Kenny said, "I taught ya how to play ball, how to ride a bike, and how to swim. Now I'm gonna show you how to high dive!"

Still holding Roger's arm, Kenny flung himself from the narrow ledge toward the shallow water below. Roger tightened his grip with the other hand, but it was easily torn away. Over the edge he went too.

He awoke sweating from the heat of the glaring sun, but not with the feeling of panic. This time the dream ended with him crawling out of the water.

He went to his clothes and got dressed. A change seemed to have come over him while he slept. Maybe coming here had done some good. Maybe, with the change in the ending of the dream, he could accept what had happened.

Glancing around the quarry for truly the last time, Kenny Davis said aloud, "I should have listened to you, Roger. You said one of us would get killed if we jumped. Somehow you knew. And I didn't listen. I shouldn't have held on to your wrist when I jumped. I shouldn't even have talked you into climbing up there with me."

****

Jean Tyrell

JACK COLEMAN

If there's anything about Jack Coleman that's catchy, it's his enthusiasm. He's pedaled to work most days since 1976. When a broken leg forced him off his bike 3 years ago, as soon as he was able, he was back on the bike, crutches strapped to the rear carrier. This is how co-workers at Joliet's Caterpillar Tractor Company probably know Jack best. Along with the stream of cars coming to and leaving the Joliet plant, everyday, there's a lone biker. It's Jack.

To Jack, the 20 or so miles he averages a day on his bike are unremarkable. He'll tell you that. But he'll also tell you he's not driven the car since his broken leg incident. Commuting on the bike is a way of thinking for this man.

(continued)

Clarence Reid

LIMERICK

There was a young girl from the city
Who was both witty and pretty
She had but one vice
Liked rolling the dice
Now she is hooked, what a pity!

****

Jack Coleman, continued

Jack's interest in cycling developed in about 1973. A used clunker of a bike from a fellow worker started it. Then two of the neighbor kids got ten speeds. These fancy bikes caught Jack's eye. The wheels, literally, were put into motion. An interest in promoting riding developed along with the miles Jack was beginning to accumulate on his rides. He bought a good bike, a lightweight, drop-handlebar model, which he still rides.

He chuckles when he talks about how he purchased his new bike in a community 40 miles away. He had his wife drop him off 10 miles from home. The ensuing ride on his lightweight, sensitive machine with its awkward rider position actually made him que sy. He claims now it was a touch of anxiety. "I had to stop every few miles or so, just to regain my composure. It was wild."

Cycling became an avocation for Jack. It's spurred him on into a whole different sphere of personal accomplishment, of being "capable of more than I have ever dreamed."

He helped organize a local bike club. As a fledgling organization, it needed more PR work than it needed rides. "You had to sell the idea that bike riding was something worth doing." This was right at the start of the early 70's bike boom. "I wondered what they thought when I went in to the County Historical Society and said, 'I'd like to do a ride to commemorate the Bicentennial.'" A Bicentennial "Paul Revere" ride was instituted approximating the distance between Lexington and Concord that night. Surprisingly, people responded, and Jack's efforts led to greater awareness by local communities of biking.

The first local century ride, the "Paul Revere" ride, a 200-miler to commemorate the 200th year of our nation, all came from Jack's newfound enthusiasm. He wasn't alone. There was a developing core of people who were catching the same enthusiasm. Jack was out in front.

As he has grown in biking experience, not always have there been easy grades. He was riding to work in early March, 1980 at about 6:45 a.m. The residue on the road under a light layer of frost was the remainder of winter's anti-skid lotion, cinders. Jack took a right turn two blocks from his house. He skidded sideways. He fell with a jarring thud. Although his feet never left the toe clips, his left leg was broken, and the left ankle joint had badly torn ligaments.

Doctors at first prescribed only casting, but later decided to operate to put a pin in the ankle.

For Jack, whose last seven years had revolved around his bicycling and running, the accident threw him into a severe depression It wasn't the pain, he'll tell you, but "being incapacitated," and "not knowing what I will be able to to do? Will I be able to ride?" It wasn't long though. Jack was back. Neighbors would see him tackling two blocks, hobbling along on his crutches. Two blocks to four blocks, two months, and believe it or not, Jack was on his bike again.

Oh, his toes were exposed in the cast. He had to remove the toe clips and change his pedal to a flat rubber pedal, but he was back riding. You can't keep Jack's enthusiasm down. He attributes it to his "I'm going to do it or die trying" attitude. It took a good year of biking to overcome the fear of right-hand turns, but coupled with his enthusiasm, Jack is very persistent.

Talking with eagerness about his training schedule, which has grown to include swimming, Jack's leanness, and angularity speak of his degree of fitness and health.

"Your ability within yourself is gradual, but the feeling of accomplishment is great,""he said as he discussed his hobby.

"Make the commitment. Give it a chance."

Jack's done just that.

****

Tom Van Horn

GIVEN NAMES

Most often, a literary character's name implies specific meaning to a reader. The following is a list of names to conjure:

Ina Crabb	Phil Etto	Etta Herman	Blanche White	Soph Few
Al Cohalic	Connie Lingulus	Ernie Lots	Jim Nasium	Ben Gay
Anna Notherthing	Jack Koff	Frank N. Earnest		Dan Dee
Ann T. Bellum	Ben Dover	Ed Settera	Grace S. Sweet	Art Test
Al Agorie	Betty Cant	Cliff Klimer	Gus Undite	Sol Amen

(continued)

Given Names, continued

Barnie Kull	Kate Onick	Joe Kester	Ike Konaclast	Bob Down
Jerry Mandering	Toby R. Notoobe	Bev Ridge	Chanda Lear	Faye DeWay
Ted E. Bare	Sandy Hare	Rhoda Hors	Harold Tribune	Dick Face
Ms. Eary	Tim Ulchuis	Jack Ell	Clyde S. Dale	Pat Mee
Gary Indiana	George Ian	Carmen Ative	Agga Tator	Sid Dur
Gus Tee	Pam Flet	Kate Alist	Eva Sive	Alex Orr
Mel Asian	Miss Ogamy	Miss Tress	Rose Acrushon	Assa Sin
Rich Mann	Vince Able	Triss Tess	Bess Murch	Len Dere
Charlotte Ruse	Hugh Mane			

****

Dave O'Brien

DEDICATION TO K. J. JR.

Some can look at 'nothing'
and find meaning
I am forever looking for a 'meaning'
but find nothing;
So be it
AAnd so on.

Hi ho
It's a funny world.

****

Rosemary Grossi

WHERE?

Are you aware
of the implications
of putting THAT
in THERE?

****

Eileen Darin

RAINDROPS

The cool rain sparkled in the dim of evening
healing the day into night.
The leaves bowed from the weight of its drops.
An end to their freefall flight.

****

Pat Roemer

DUBLIN PUBLICAN

Sing me a song,
Ol' boy.
Sell me a scam,
Ol' man.
Set me an offer,
you Ol' codger.
I've 'ad a few,
tis nothin' new,
Ol' Katie
will oblige.

****

Paul Houser

HOME

Having
One
Means
Everything

****

Debbie Morris

TEARS ROLLING

Tears rolling endless
waving goodbye forever
the train pulls away.

****

Clarence Reid

Limerick

Her hair had grown down to her knees
Of it she was proud as you please
She was given a pet
By a neighborhood vet
And soon had a head full of fleas.

****

Susan Zupancic

TREES

hey, they are
beside the pool
in the middle of
this large hotel

i wonder if they're
real, or just five-
story high plastic
trees

****

Judy Belfield

A HELL OF A PIECE

Snap! The window shade shot up and flap-flap-flapped over its roller.

Ira Blum bolted into a sitting position in his single bed. The raised shade was like a broken dam--it unleased a tidal wave of sunshine into the room. Sunlight flooded the ivory walls, the dark blue rug, and the white-lacquered furniture. It splashed all over Ira's face, spattered his sleep-encrusted eyes.

"Shit," he said, slithering slowly out of bed. He shuffled over to the window and pulled the shade down. Then he crawled back in between the sheets and rolled into a fetal position. The shade snapped up again.

"Shit," said Ira, pulling the blue and white flower-print blanket over his head. "Shit, shit, shit." He had planned to sleep in today. Now that was impossible. Once he had gotten out of bed, he could never go back to sleep.

"Shit," he repeated under the blanket, his eyes wide open. He closed them gently, but it was useless and he knew it. He began to feel warm, even though the blanket in which he'd cocooned himself was summer-weight. Ira Blum never used a blanket--he didn't like to sweat.

He pressed the light-button on his digital watch--7:30--and groaned. The whole morning--he'd have to endure the whole morning. He had wanted to sleep this morning away. That way, the problem of what to do with all his time would only plague him through an afternoon and the early part of an evening: The late part was easily dealt with--all he had to do was switch on the TV to escape the guilt he felt about wasting another day. In the afternoon, the programming was less diverse. His mind could never be captured totally by soap operas and game shows. Thus, it wandered, wandered into Guiltland, where it invited uncomfortable twinges and vague anxieties to set up camp in Ira's body.

Now he had to deal with the morning too.

Ira Blum was a writer. He had written two novels, both horror stories. The second had been made into a movie. Success had come easy.

But that was two years ago. Since then, Ira hadn't been able to write even one full page that satisfied him. At first, he had thought he was suffering from a temporary block that would soon disappear, and then he would be able to grind out another book with the same ease that had produced the first two. For weeks after the film had stopped showing, he had gotten out of bed early, put on the coffee pot, and settled at his desk, only to come up with a succession of lackluster plots and a few unremarkable characters. Then, he had changed his routine. He still got up early, but put off staring at the empty paper until afternoon. Later, he put it off until evening. Then, he stopped altogether--no use sitting at the desk for nothing. After several months, he thought, if it wasn't going to happen, then it just wasn't going to happen. He would wait for an idea to strike him.

His agent called regularly. Ira put him off, told Manny that he was working on "a hell of a piece," and to leave him alone if he ever wanted to see it finished. Manny put up with it. After all, two best-sellers and movie rights had netted him a comfortable cut, and he was confident that Ira could come through again. Hadn't the critics said a new Stephen King had been born?

The guilt and anxiety declared squatters' rights in Ira's bones.

"I'm not burned out yet," he told himself. Every night before he fell asleep, he chastised himself for not producing, and then promised to get down to business the next day--pull his guts out trying, if that's what it took.

A year passed. Ira's hopes dissolved--vaporized right out of his mind, and now hovered over the typewriter in his "writing room." He closed the door to the room; he didn't want to be reminded. But he got a chill every time he passed it--from behind the closed door, Guilt reached out with icy fingers and thrummed an arctic melody on his spine.

Money wasn't a problem--not yet anyway. He still had enough to tide him over for quite some time, provided he didn't do anything foolish, but foolishness was out of character for Ira. Aside from an occasional drinking binge, Ira rarely indulged in frivolity, and never when money was involved. He lived in a modest home in a rural area near Chicago. The home was furnished and decorated smartly but economically. Forth-two-year-old Ira had never been married, a fact which had caused his mother to suffer daily attacks of the most extreme agitation. She had died before Ira's second book came out, and the once-a-week phone calls from Brooklyn had ceased. He didn't have to listen to "Did you meet any nice girls this week?" any more. That should have been a relief, but strangely, he missed his mother's nagging for a long time. He did not, however, miss not having a wife.

Into the second year of Ira's barrenness, Manny's calls became less frequent. He hadn't given up on Ira. He

(continued)

just had his fingers in so many pies, that Ira, not being one of the writers who had furnished one of the pies for so long, faded from his mind for longer periods of time. That suited Ira fine--it made the guilt a little easier to bear.

But just yesterday, Manny had phoned.

"How's tricks, Ira?"

"Oh--gettin there, I think."

"Still working on the same book?"

"Oh, yeah. It's gonna be a hell of a piece when it's done. And, Manny, I got a few other ideas, too, that I think are gonna hit."

"That's great, Ira. It's been--what?--almost two and a half years now since Cast A Spell. People are gonna forget you."

"I don't know what to tell you, Manny. Except--it's moving."

"Yeah, well--can't force genius, I guess. Ha-ha. Keep plugging and let me know as soon as you're close to completion, eh?"

"Sure, Manny. Sure."

"You don't want to reconsider your decision about lettin me see some of the first few chapters, huh?"

"No. I told you, that'll stop the flow."

"It'd mean some cash, you know."

"I don't need any. I'm fine."

"Okay, okay. We're all stinkin rich and don't need to worry about money. Ha-ha. Well, gotta go."

It was getting unbearably warm under the blanket. But the light outside it was still splashing around the room The fire or the frying pan, Ira thought. Some choice.

The dampness he began to feel in the hair under his arms decided it--he threw the blanket back and sat up. He hated to sweat.

He stretched his arms and legs, then got up and walked over to the window, his naked body framed there for anybody who wanted to see. Nobody did. He pulled the shade back down and plodded to the bathroom. He turned on the hot water in the shower, letting it run while he used the toilet. A minute later, icy needles struck his leg as he poked it between the shower curtains.

"Christ," he yelled, checking the faucets. Yes, he had turned on the one marked "hot," but no, there wasn't any hot water. He fiddled with the knobs for awhile, but still no hot water, He checked the sink. No hot water there either. He pulled a ratty blue bathrobe off a hook behind the door and put it on, tying the soft, fraying belt around his waist as he came back into the bedroom.

It was nice and gray there now. He thought for a minute about climbing back into bed, decided against it, and headed for the utility room next to the kitchen.

Snap! The shade in the bedroom shot up as he passed through the door.

The pilot light was on under the tank of the water heater. While he was crouched down to check it, it had ignited the burner unit, and the water was heating up. That was odd. There was no hot water, but the water heater was working. Maybe it had shut off somehow during the night and had just now started up again. He didn't know how that could happen, but he would check the water in a while, give it a little time, and see if everything was okay.

He turned the Mister Coffee switch to "on" as he passed through the kitchen. He opened the front door and walked out to the mailbox to get the newspaper.

"Damn," he muttered. No paper. It figured. He went back into the house and sat at the kitchen table watching the coffee maker dribble its brew into the glass pot. He always prepared the coffee maker the night before so he wouldn't have to wait so long in the morning. At least, he thought, the Mister Coffee's working.

From the kitchen archway, he glanced inattentively at the living room, sweeping the room casually from corner to corner. His gaze was arrested by the door to the "writing room." It was open--just a crack--but open nevertheless That was strange. It hadn't been opened in--how long was it? Maybe there was someone in the house. He stood up quietly and tiptoed across the living room. He tried to peek through the crack of the door. He reached his hand through it and flipped on the light switch. No noises. No movement.

He pushed the door open and stepped inside. Nobody was there. Everything was in place, just as he'd left it--when was it? He shuddered--then pulled the door shut securely.

Ira settled into his favorite chair in the living room with a cup of coffee, and lit a cigarette. Now what? What was he going to do? He scanned the coffee table in front of the sofa. It was littered with newspapers and magazines. He'd been snipping out articles the night before. One never knew where an idea might come from, or when it would hit. The scissors he had used were lying open next to a neat little stack of clippings. For a second, he thought about finishing the job.

"Nah, I don't feel like it now," he grumbled.

He picked up the TV Guide. He hadn't watched morning television in ages--it might be a whole new adventure. He opened the magazine to Wednesday's listings. Abruptly, he looked up.

(continued)

Something had rattled somewhere. He listened. The rattle started again. It came from the scissors. They were vibrating on the coffee table. He stared, eyes wide, eyebrows raised. His mouth dropped. They were moving. The scissors were vibrating on the table, moving in his direction. They stopped.

"Queerest damned thing," said Ira after he'd recollected his senses. He walked the three steps to the coffee table and picked up the scissors. Nothing different about them.

"Queerest damned thing," he repeated, looking over and under the coffee table. He didn't know what he was looking for. Maybe we're having an earthquake, he thought, settling back in his chair. But nothing else had moved, nothing else had rattled.

He sat and smoked for a quarter of an hour, his eyes riveting to the scissors every few seconds. Nothing happened. Everything was quiet. "Hmmm," he said. "This is weird."

Finally, he picked up the TV Guide again, flipping back to Wednesday's listings.

Suddenly, a fast, hissing sound split the silence. His head jerked up, his eyes fixed on the scissors. They were coming straight at him. He ducked, the TV Guide frozen in his hands. The scissors sliced through the magazine, backed up, sliced through it again. Ira gaped, his face contorted, a terror creeping up his neck.

He dropped the pieces of the TV Guide. The scissors fell to the floor.

"Whatthehell is happening?" he yelled. The house was silent. "What's going on?" he yelled. Silence.

He stared at the scissors lying on the rug. They were possessed, he thought. My God, the scissors are possessed. He bent over to pick them up, but stopped when his fingers were within an inch of the handle. They didn't move. He moved his hand closer, slowly. He touched the cool metal and still they didn't move. He picked them up.

"Sheriff, I have a pair of possessed scissors in my house. They're trying to kill me." It was insane. He couldn't call the sheriff. Anyway, if the scissors really were possessed, what could a cop do?

Still in the ratty bathrobe, he padded out to the back door carrying the scissors. He walked out to the edge of his yard, beyond which was a huge, open field. The farmer who owned it had moved away, planning to divide the land into lots and sell them off some time in the future.

Ira glanced at the scissors one more time, and then hurled them as far as he could into the open field. They sailed into the air, glittered in the sunshine, and fell.

Ira waited for what seemed an age. They didn't come sailing back. He trudged into the house.

"Who could I call?" he thought. I can't just sit here thinking about it. I've got to tell somebody. Who would I tell? Who would believe it?

"That's right, Manny--possessed scissors. They tried to kill me." Manny would howl over the phone, ask Ira if that was part of his new book. Then he'd tell Ira not to waste his time. Speilberg had just gone the poltergeist route, and it would have to be one hell of a book if people were going to buy just any old "things-that-go-bump-in-the-night" story.

No. He wouldn't tell Manny. He wouldn't tell anyone. What if he persisted with the story, insisted it was true? He'd been out there alone for so long. People would think he was crazy . . . maybe . . . maybe, he was.

Everything in the house belied what had happened. Everything was quiet. He refilled his coffee cup, lit another cigarette. He sat in the living room staring and thinking. From time to time, he glanced down at the pieces of the TV Guide. He hadn't imagined it. There was the magazine--sliced twice. But then, maybe he'd done it himself . . . went a little mad and cut up the magazine himself. He thought of Norman Bates in "Psycho" telling Janet Leigh, "We all go a little mad sometimes."

No. He wasn't crazy. Those scissors had flown in the air. He had seen it. Hadn't he?

He'd begun to relax a little when he noticed it. The door of the "writing room" was ajar.

"C'mon," he said. "C'mon, for Chrissake. What's going on?"

As he neared the door this time, he was afraid--so afraid he was trembling. His breathing seemed loud and erratic. He flipped the light switch on. Still no sounds.

As he placed his hand on the door to push it open, something powerful, like a high wind in reverse, sucked him inside. He crashed through the doorway, twisting, turning, fighting the suction, and fell on the floor a few feet from the desk. The wind stopped, the door slammed shut. He ran to it, tried to pull it open, but it wouldn't budge. He was trapped.

Now Ira was sure. There was a spirit, there was a "something," in the house. It wanted to kill him. He looked around the room, his eyes falling on the letter opener glistening in the overhead light. It lay on the desk, next to the blotter, next to some pens. He stood rigid, not daring to move. It would return, he was certain. Maybe it was still in the room watching him.

"What have I done? Why do you want

(continued)

to kill me? For God's sake, answer!"

It did. A whoosh of air forced him into the chair behind the desk. The letter opener rattled on the wooden desk-top. It quivered, vibrated.

The "something" grabbed Ira's right arm, pulling it up on the desk toward the letter opener. He screamed, fighting the thing that lifted his arm.

"What is it? What is it? Don't kill me . . . what do you want?"

His hand inched toward the letter opener. He tried to pull it back with his free arm. The thing--the spirit--whatever it was, slammed his left arm back against the chair. His fingers touched the letter opener.

"No . . . no," he pleaded.

The thing moved his hand violently. Ira closed his eyes, opening them seconds later to see, not the letter opener gripped in his hand, but a pen.

"Are you going to tell me? Is that it? You're going to write what you want? Through me? Yes, yes, do it. Tell me what you want."

He grabbed a sheet of paper from the corner of the desk and held the pen over it. He waited.

"Well, c'mon. Do it. Tell me!"

His hand began to move. The ink flowed onto the page into neat little squiggles and curlicues. Words appeared one after the other. Ira read as his hand moved:

"Snap! The window shade shot up and flap-flap-flapped over its roller . . ."

****

Jennifer Jones

MINDSEARCH

you . . . (as all others)
offerings of the best abilities
(sweating with strong-
willed per severance)
how many days, weeks, of
gentle, tentatively
probing affection
equal
one moment of
shared understanding
and
a smile

****

Sandra Reardon

THE GOLDEN YEARS AFFAIR

It's early evening. On the "senile floor" of the Golden Years Nursing Home, the supper trays have long since been sent to the kitchen and everyone is ready for bed. The opiates that will calm the fears, both real and imagined, and hasten sleep have been crushed, mixed with applesauce and passed down unknowing throats. The more restless residents have been restrained in the soft cotton vests that will hold them safely in their beds--except for Herb, whose family won't allow it. Every night the nurse prays that he won't fall; his son can't admit that Herb is old, much less that he's senile.

As she makes her rounds, checking teeth cups and bed rails, she notices the beauty of the sunset in sharp contrast to the dreariness of the hall where she stands. Somehow, knowing that that beauty exists makes the bleakness of her job easier to bear.

A familiar voice causes her to turn from the sunset in time to see Matt, muttering in German, shuffle slowly down the hall. She watches as he goes to Ann's room. The floor supervisor thinks of Matt as a dirty old man and doesn't approve of this nightly ritual, but the nurse, herself a widow, does nothing to stop it.

Matt takes Ann by the hand and gently leads her back to his room. They never exchange words; the entire communication takes place through the senses of touch and sight. The two of them look at each other and then at the bed. Slowly, Matt pulls back the sheet and pats

(continued)

Charlotte Pennington

WHAT IS REALITY?

When black & white goes color
When color goes 3-D
Then every sound goes through
Your ears and moves you
rhythmically

When forward won't go backwards
And when you don't agree,
Then liquids turn to solids
And end up just like me.

Where up is down
And all around
Is near and far surrounding,
And bells won't ring, the
Real thing seems boring
not astounding.

****

the pillow. Ann shakes her head and turns to leave. Ever the gentleman, Matt escorts Ann back to her own room, where he again pulls down the sheet, all the while watching Ann. He smoothes the clean, soft pillow and sits on the edge of the bed.

The nurse turns again to the sunset--but quickly looks back. The ritual is taking on an added dimension.

Ann is sitting on the bed beside Matt, softly whistling, as she always does when she's happy. Playing with Matt's fingers, she ternderly helps him lift her thin cotton nightgown.

The nurse quietly closes the door and leaves them alone. She returns once more to the window to watch the continuously changing fading beauty of the sunset.

****

Judy Belfield

BEFORE I FALL ASLEEP

Sometimes at night,
I try to imagine
death.
I close my eyes,
lie very still,
blank my mind.

The cat leaps from the dresser
and lands with a soft thump.
A car's engine groans outside,
and the heartbeat in my ears
begins to sound like soldiers marching.

I always conclude
the same old thing:
no matter how hard I try,
I cannot imagine
void.

****

Anita Rutkowski

SWAMP STOMPING AND BAR ROOM BRAWLING

I have a confession to make . . . I am a Swamp Stomper.

No. I am not some large, prehistoric monster, nor am I an alligator-hunter. I am the girlfriend of a guy with a truck. Not just any truck. And not just any four-wheel drive truck . . . it's a Ford, black with a white cab--lifters yet to come.

Gary, alias Hoppy, alias Spudder, alias my boyfriend, belongs to a club called the Swamp Stompers. To get in, you must have a four-wheel drive truck; to be an honorary member, you have to be a girl that has landed herself one of the most sought-after guys in Lemont. I have. Thus, I am.

Female Swamp Stompers have several duties which they are required to perform; the main one is being with your man at every Swamp Stomper social gathering. Unfortunately, they gather every night. Sitting in a parking lot or a deserted off-road night after night does get to be

C. L. Weatherford

FLEUR D'AMOUR

A life as I have lived it should not be
Forever in a daydream with my
Life unknown and though daisies in
My garden grow. Roses could they
Be. If only life were magic and
Lovers could we be.

On the floor of a forest carpeted
With the leaves of autumn, the
Towering trees tapering to trunks
Torn by time, I met thee for
The first and knew there was
Love to come. We stood near
To a spider's silks draped
O'er a chrysanthemum.

To what extents I could fall
In the depths of warm emotion,
I had never known before, nor had
I any notion of what would come
To me and thee through our
Heartfelt devotion. I should
Have been much happier had
Time not taken thee.

But we all do change to the
Whims of time. Our likes do
Change with neither reason
Nor rhyme, and the rhythm of life
Alters the chime, and so your
Choice of him or me, I can't
Mind.

Now, I dream of the
Times we had and the life that
Could have been. I sometimes
Forget that you have gone and
Call I then your name.
I can and will live without you.
How well is yet to be seen.
But this life I lead is still
A merciless game.

****

monotonous, even when you enjoy the company, but it's all worth it when you find out you're going to take a weekend road trip. Not just a Sunday afternoon trip . . . a whole weekend with just you, your boyfriend, and at least eight

(continued)

other people.

One cold weekend last April we took such a trip. The Swamp Stompers were going to race on Sunday afternoon at Great Lakes Dragway in Union Grove, Wisconsin. We had a pre-race party on Friday night at the quarries, and the Swamp Stompers' president told his people that they would leave from his auto body shop at 7:00 a.m. (sharp) Sunday morning. Upon hearing the time, I promptly told Gary that I wouldn't be going. He laughed, patted my behind, and said patronizingly, "poor baby."

I left Gary and went over to where my girlfirends were standing . . . I came just in time to hear them gossip about our local herpes queen; definitely not-miss gossip material. Just as our subject of discussion was changing, guess who called me over? Queen Laurie! I tried my best to swallow my guilt, then I went over to where she was standing with her boyfriend, Bob, and Gary.

They had a plan . . . I could tell by the innocent and charming look on Gary's face. This was the plan . . . Bob's family has a house in Wisconsin that's only a half an hour from Union Grove, so they thought it would be fun if we went up there on Saturday and just meet everyone on Sunday at the drag strip. After making sure that there were more than two bedrooms in his house, I agreed . . . happily; I couldn't remember the last time I had been alone with Gary.

Alas, it was too good to be true . . when Gary pulled into my driveway on Saturday, Hamm and Ron spilled out of the truck, greeted my mother with uncommon courtesy, took my bag, and crawled into the back of the truck. When my mother was done lecturing Gary and he was back behind the wheel, he informed me the plans had been changed slightly. From my house we went to get the rest of the group . . . Tony, his girlfriend Angie, and Whiffer. Bob and Laurie had already left.

So my romantic night on Powers Lake turned into just another night with the guys. The good news was that they planned on camping out in the trucks.

We arrived at Klotz's beautiful home, went to the door, and were shocked to have it answered by Mrs. Klots; but not half as shocked as she was upon seeing five guys and two girls . . . she was just expecting Gary and me, as was the equally shocked Bob. We quickly explained that all of us were going to sleep in the trucks, but Mrs. Klotz wouldn't hear of it. . . there was plenty of room.

Bob herded us out the door, and we piled into our three trucks to go out to this "great bar" Bob goes to when he's up there. This "great bar" that took us three trucks to get to turned out to be two blocks away. Bob's like that sometimes.

The bar was nice . . . when using Wisdonsin's standards, that is. Bob's brother and sister-in-law were sitting at the bar as we walked in. As everyone went to the tables, I stopped Gary midway and had him order us some dinner . . . I like to keep my priorities straight.

When Gary came over to the table, he had a watermelon in his hand . . . "Well," he said, "if we can't have romance, we might as well drown our sorrows." Gary intended for me to be buried on just the one . . . which I was, but I would later dig deeper.

So, along came the food and pitchers of beer, and the opportunity to get to really know these people . . . I even kind of enjoyed Laurie's company.

After an hour or two, everyone kind of broke into two groups. Gary, Tony, Bob, Ron and Hamm were at one table talking about the race. Laurie, Angie, Whiffer and I were at another.

Since I don't drink beer, I had only had that one watermelon. I was at least five drinks behind the others. But Whiffer, that sweet darling, fat overaffectionate, sixteen-year-old, fixed that up right away. Three very strong watermelons later, Gary came back to our table and Whiffer got up to let him sit next to me. Whiffer, being a smart guy and knowing Gary well, headed over to join Ron and Hamm in a game of pool. Gary has since informed me that the conversation he tried to carry on with me was rather one-sided, but I did manage to inform him of the identity of the guy who got me drunk. Gary leaned me against the wall I was sitting next to and went over to the pool tables, so I was left with Tony and Angie.

I can remember staring at the signs above the bathroom doors . . . "Inboard" and "Outboard" they read. Finally, I decided I'd settle on either. I got up and managed to walk the eight feet to the bathroom in around five minutes. Some guy in a group of guys (to be referred to as "the others" later on) standing around the bathrooms was kind enough to open the correct door for me. (Inboard) When I came back out, the same guy patted my behind and asked if I would like a drink. The next thing I knew, Tony was at my side and the guy was apologizing to us. Tony led me back to the table which was holding Angie and Laurie up; then he joined the guys at the pool table.

The next thing I remember was thinking that there might be a fight going on. Five minutes later (or what seemed like) I heard the glass breaking. Then I was pretty sure that it was a fight. I asked Angie what she thought, and just then a coat rack crashed onto our table. Definitely a fight.

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I stood up to look for Gary, but I couldn't find him anwwhere. All of a sudden, Angie shot out of the booth crying and screaming and jumped onto some guys back and started kicking and pinching. She was good. I was still looking for Gary when Hamm literally picked me up and threw me out the side door. I heard more glass break, and then Angie came stumbling out the door. She was crying uncontrollabley, so I took her to Tony's truck where she cried herself to sleep.

The cold air was sobering me up quickly as I went back to stand on the bar's patio. Next, out came Whiffer, crying harder than Angie. "I didn't mean to hit him! I didn't! I couldn't help it! He was punching my friend Bob . . . I had to stop him!" Then the 200+ pound Whiff fell on top of me. As I way lying there, struggling to get Baby Huey off of me, the fight flew out the door and surrounded me. I left Whiffer on top of me for protection. By the shoes I knew it was Hamm and Tony. Then, they moved it back in as quickly as they had moved it out.

Whiffer got up and we took each other over to the trucks- It was then that my parents acquired a son . . . Whiffer decided that he loved me and he wanted to be my brother and my protector. Then he started crying again because he was fat and he didn't think he could get any pretty girls to go out with him. Then he fell again, half on the road, half under Tony's truck. I moved his legs so they were out of danger, then went back to the bar to see if it was over yet.

Here's something I've learned through being present at three of their major fights . . . these guys won't quit, especially Bob. His neck actually swells up, and he just goes wild . . . Normally he's very quiet and shy. Another thing I've learned is that they're pretty good in a fight.

Well, things were winding down in there . . . the bartender, who likes Bob, was throwing "the other guys" out the door, and Bob's brother had Bob pinned to the floor to keep him from going after them. I still couldn't find Gary, and was about to ask about him when he walk-out of the "Outboard" room. He gave me a tired grin and hugged me with arms that I found out later on had blood flowing down them. One less white sweater in my wardrobe. I also spent the next three days picking glass out of those arms.

As we sat at the bar, settling the till, Whiffer came and started crying and hugging everyone. That's when I saw the huge pool of blood on the floor. It turned out be be from Gary's nose. That was it . . . he knew I'd be his sucker for at least thr next three weeks. So, that was why I couldn't find him . . he had been on the floor the whole time I had been looking for him. But, he did get some good punches in.

Why did the fight start? Between me getting my behind patted and one of them pouring a beer over Ron's head . . Boys will be boys.

Well, we finally made it back to Bob's house. I took my sweater and washed it in cold water, but Gary wanted his to have the blood left on it so he could show the guys at the races the next day.

The next agonizing morning we arrived at Union Grove with cuts, bruises, hangovers and plenty of stories to tell. Gary's shirt was passed around, and I informed some sympathetic girls that wanted to console Gary that the only sympathy or consolation he needed was mine, thank you very much. A few hours later, Gary, with me riding shotgun, won a third place trophy. What did I clutch in my hands? His bloody shirt, of course. (He still has it in there, the sentimental fool.)

As we were on our way home, before I fell asleep with the hum of the wheels as my lullabye, all I could think of was how I couldn't wait to sit a parking lot or deserted off-road, and perform my main duty as an honorary Swamp Stomper . . . to be with my man at every gathering.

****

Debbie Morris

CARDS

The Queen of Hearts
went for a walk
to see the King of Spades

Something must be done
about the fun
the Joker had today.

He stole the Six
and scared the Nine
now no one wants to play

He ripped the Eight
and beat the Clubs
made everyone go away.

The King of Spades
he sent his son
the boy's name was Jack
on a manhunt he would go
and bring the Joker back.

Out he rode onto the Deck
and there he caught his man.
He dragged him back into the pack
so they were full again.

****

Jeanette L. Gruber

BETTER I THAN A STRANGER

Tammy, you know the things that rankle me, which ignite my debator flair, and snarl my left cheek sneer. You say these things even as you care . . . Your mouth flies at the most sticky speck in my speech, my weakest logic link.

"That's not how it is in the business world," and you talk of computers, my field, not yours. You've never even untangled the longlegged bugs of FORTRAN, BASIC, or COBOL. What gall! I flare, but the stubborn coal in your mind refuses to light.

"He's only nice to you because he's your lab partner, and he needs a good grade." Dismiss my carefully tended spark with a cool breeze and a cold brown eye under the guise of "Rosy lenses set you up for a fall. It's better that I, your caring friend, tell you than he, a stranger." Tammy, you say what you think when you think it, and pride yourself on clear perceptions. Is that why the same "he", recovering from drunken blindness, kissed you till you bled, and blamed you for it all in the morning. How is it that he used you, Madame Perception. Or did you secretly borrow my lenses to peek sneakily, only to stomp on them, forcefully certain of your original convictions.

And yet I return to you. Giddy with rose-petaled tales of another day, from which you extract pure red blood. You tell me again that it's better that you extract it than someone else.

But this time I've learned . . .

I formerly took the blood sad tears away from our communion. Now, instead, I reach out for the white droplets you drip from the extraction, and these I treasure. The red is placed in absent hands. Your means of joy remains only in the dried blood brown droplets left.

Bitterness festers.
Thorn thoughts thrive.

****

Lynette Fields

WATER LOVE

The pulsating, gyrating, invigorating force of the water massaged my breasts and kissed my nipples. A few several droplets nestled in my belly button. A lost, mischievous trickle tickled my thighs. A bold, brazen barrage of water slapped my buttocks. I turned off the faucet and a forgotten spatter kissed my face.

****

Susan Fiene

WORKING OUT

Depressed,
Upset,
Lacking energy.
Breathe in, breathe out,
Again in, again out;
Push up!
Slowly and controlled;
Repeat.
Twisting,
Bending,
Stretching,
Getting in shape.
Energetic,
Alive,
Fulfilled,
Renewed.

****

Paul Houser

THE CLIPPER SHIP

With her mast sail high
The lady flyer went sailing on
The gallant ship from days gone by

The proud captain and his trusted crew
Took her on to many distant ports
Like an albatross across water she flew

Her days are gone; she'll never more trod
To distant places and exotic ports
She sits now resting in the hands of God.

****

Steve Faron

A SIGHT FOR SORE MINDS

FROM
No's-THO
OhW .H triB
Investigates
TI .ecneirepxE
Alls it takes iS
?Uoy naC .od yleruS
Dream was a dream? I
A dnA ?detnuoc ytse-nO
Remember the moment when
.GNIEB nwod sgnirb ylecracS

****

Christie Doyle

MY CLOSET SHELF

When I open my closet
and look up toward its shelf

I see a rainbow of colors
old school books
folders
notebooks

and
a Coke bottle.

****

Stacy Biedermann

DIETER'S PLEA

Oh lord please help me,
I need a clue . . !
How can I lose weight
without turning BLUE?
I've tried all the diets
I could possibly find,
but I always end up
fat in the behind!

****

Judy Belfield

A BOY'S BEST FRIEND

She takes him out for breakfast
every day before school.
They sit in a booth--
both on the same side
so she can smooth his ten-year-old hair
and coo funnies in his ear.
They smile,
giggle at each other
every other minute or so.
She pats his shoulder
nuzzles his neck,
straightens his collar,
kisses his cheek--
no end to the touching
which seems to say,
even though she's got a husband,
"You're all I have in this big, bad world."
Little boy believes her
with all his heart--
it shows in his dilated eyes,
little fawn gazing lovingly
at Momma
through thick glasses.

****

Eileen Darin

PAINTED

She screamed her last word. He sat on the bed.

She slammed the door

and drove away He hung his head.

Lit a cigarette

and stared at the floor.

****

Vickie Carmichael

THE DANCER

The wrinkled hands were folded on her mountainous lap. The hands worked nervously at the sash around her middle. They were pale hands with large splotches of color partially hidden among the folds and wrinkles. A single gold band adorned the third finger of the left hand. The knuckles of the long fingers were large and protruding.

"I was a dancer," she said to anyone and no one. As she rocked back and forth in the chair she would hum softly some ancient tune as it it were a magical chant with the power to restore her. A chant with no words, just inflections barely discernable to the unaware. The hands still worked at the sash.

"I danced for Flo Ziegfeld," again she spoke but no one was near to hear. In her mind she was again dancing the latest craze, creating new sensations with each movement. She whirled across the floor taking command of the stage as if it were her birthright. She made it all look so easy. She had talent, they all said. She'd go places, no chorus line for her.

She sat stooped over. Shoulders slumped inward as if some weight borne for many years had deformed her body. Her spine bubbled out at the base of the neck where a hump formed. Her legs were

(continued)

stout with distended knee caps and ankles. The legs, too, were pale, but splattered with large discolored sections. Some places red, some brown. A large bruise marked her right shin.

The rocking slowed, the movement changing to side to side. Her feet, housed in heavy black shoes began to move ever so slightly. The shoes were old and hardly even black in places. They were run over on the instep and one of the laces had been broken and retied at the break. They were uncomfortable shoes for uncomfortable feet. The hands worked the sash around her waist.

"I used to dance in the Follies."

Her face was the face of all old and tired people. Wrinkled skin that gave little idea of the beauty that may once have been there. A bandaid on her creased forehead. The eyes had lost their color and now looked at the world gray and glazed. The lips showed signs of having once been full, but now receded into a mouth that had few teeth left. The cheeks hung in folds as did her chin. Her hair, what there was of it, was gray and disheveled. Often one of the wrinkled hands would move to her face, tracing an invisible line down her forehead and nose. Then, leaping quickly to her hair in some urgent gesture, soon to return to the sash around her waist.

The rocking stopped and the chant broke off. She would straighten her blue print dress. The material worn thin by frequent washings was so thread-bare in places you could see though it. But her hands moved over it meticulously smoothing here and there. Then, as fast as it had come, the change would leave and the rocking return.

"I used to be a dancer," the voice croaked. There was no power to the voice, no volume. A hoarse voice that betrayed its frequent use. Hardly able to produce any variance in tone or inflection.

Someone walked past and a wrinkled hand shot out. Pulling the arm closer to grab it with both hands. "I used to be a dancer," she repeated to her captive. "I danced for Flo Ziegfeld," she said rapidly as the arm was freed from her grasp.

"I guess I'd better untie her and walk her down to the dining room," the aide said.

"Yeah, lunch will be ready soon. Just make sure you tie her in good. She falls down too much and aint supposed to walk by herself," her companion explained.

"That's a hell of a way for a dancer to end up."

"Dancer, shit. Once this lady showed up. Said she was Essie's cousin. Well, I asked her about the dancing. She says Essie wasn't no dancer, just a housewife."

"Well, aint that the damnedest thing. Guess she always wanted to be one though," said the aide as she slowly walked the arthritic old woman down the hall.

****

Judy Belfield

PRESENTS

I give you
myself
in this ink,
locked in the letters.
Discover me here.
I inhabit the words
like an old hermit
afraid of sunshine.
Breathe me through your mind--
for a moment,
I live.

*****

Susan Zupancic

COLORFUL CORTEX

He's got 2nd thoughts
bout the people around him
Wants to go to sleep
cause the dreams astound him

Visual monsters awake in his brain
Colorful dragons driving the train
that meets him in the station

Pushes the cartoons
aside in his head
Trying so hard not
to fall out of bed

With an increasing dread
of the world outside
He makes it to work
another day

****

Robert "Gap" Webb

PHOTOGRAPHY

The eye we are told
   is a camera
but the film is the heart
not the brain
and our hands joining
those that reach
develop the product

Watching the red sun bleed
into the ocean
one thinks of the beauty
that fire brings
if the eye is a camera
and the film is the heart
then the photo assistant is GOD.

****

Pat Roemer

REVIVAL

Moonlight, wonderlit, spooned velvet
                night.
Purify my nostrils of the day's dung.
Cleanse my senses with the water of still-
                ness you so graciously
                pour after every storm.
I need but to lay in your nothingness,
                cast no reflection.
The dark complete retreat
Provide for the fetal functioning
I perform so comfortably,
In the INDIA INK arms of solidarity
                that are yours alone
                to spend
On my weary soul.

****

Jean Tyrell

LETTER TO THE BELL COMPANY

Bell Company
Manufacturers of Helmets and Bike
                Accessories
P. O. Box 78
Wheeling, California   00288

To whom it may concern:

I am writing you regarding your cycling helmet for bike tourists called the Bell Touring Helmet. I've been the owner of your touring helmet for a short while--and want to point out the diversity of its uses.

I know the object of the helmet--to protect a rider's head in case of a collision or accident where a rider is thrown--but the stated purpose and the actual purposes do not always meet. For example, I've yet to test your helmet in a fall from my bike, but last Tuesday, while carrying my bike up 28 steps to my apartment, my head hit the corner of the gutterspout which overhangs the stairs. Under normal circumstances this impact would have knocked me out--But NO! I was wearing my Bell helmet, as I was fresh from my ride. It saved me from the great tragedy of a gash in my forehead--or the remote possibility of a fall down 28 steps with my bike.

Two days later while in the act of greasing my bike chain, I bent over double to view the chain from upside down. Needless to say, I was quite near the porch bannister, closer than I thought. WOONK! went my head against the porch railing. But I was saved again. My head was ensconced in my Bell Helmet.

Lastly, the closet where I store my bike (contrary to local myths, I don't sleep with my bike--I put it in my clothes closet) has a doorway suited only for a person of elfin proportions. Forgetting to duck, as I have on a number of times, I hit my head on the door jamb. Last week, same thing, BUT I still had on my helmet!

The whole purpose of th s writing is to tell you I've given up wearing my helmet while bike riding, it doesn't seem necessary. But I wear it everywhere else. I get odd looks, but few bumps on the noggin. You ought to be promoting your helmet in the housewares line.

Sincerely,

Wanda Klutzenhiemer

****

Tom Van Horn

S.P.E.R.M.

A society for the preservation
of equal rights for men
should be formed as soon
as enough men can get away from
their wives or sweethears
for the one-evening-a-week-meetings.

****

Judy Belfield

ANONYMOUS PHOTO

A Russian woman
in a crowd--
caught by a camera
she didn't see.
In her eyes
a soft smile,
an unmistakable joy.

I wonder . . .
what caused those eyes
to rhapsodize?

In a mirror
I have seen eyes smile
much the same.

****

Linda Schweitzer

FOREIGN FEELING

I felt a spark of happiness today.
And as the feeling faded,
I tried to figure out just where it had come from.
It popped into existence so suddenly, just as a kernel suddenly pops into a puff of corn.
When it arrived, it neither jumped up and down, nor screamed for attention.
The feeling simply sat in my head and tingled my body with its unfamiliarity.
Then, for no reason, it got up and walked away as quietly as a sneaker walking on marshmallows.
I will just go on being until the feeling comes again.
I suppose then I will again sit and wonder just where the feeling came from.

****

Anita Rutkowski

KIDS, COWS AND CATTLE

One balmy summer evening, not too long ago, I sat at the picnic table with my boyfriend, Hoppy, in his backyard.

Oh we laughed and played, giggled and frolicked, as young lovers will do. Then Hoppy held me in his arms . . . the arms that would shelter, protect, and comfort me for the rest of our lives. Our playfulness diminished as we started to discuss our future.

After an hour of debating, we decided on having nine children; then we went on to discuss names. . . oh the hours just seemed to fly by.

While we were discussing honeymoon plans, I glimpsed something out of the corner of my eye. I turned to see what it was and noticed the fence that kept the cows herded together had broken . . . the cows were stampeding toward us!

"Hoppy," I screamed, "the cows are stampeding toward us!" I got up and tried to run away, but Hoppy grabbed my arm and swung me back onto the picnic table. The cows were still heading straight for us. They were almost upon us! I looked at Hoppy, frightened and confused.

"Those," Hoppy screamed back at me, "are NOT cows! They are cattle!"

Before I could correct myself, the cattle had arrived. They slowed their pace and proceeded to surround the picnic table. One came right up to me, stood face to face, and seemed to evaluate me. Suddenly, its teeth, covered with cud, grabbed my shirt and pulled me down to the ground. It stood on top of me, its right front hoof on my chest, the left one on my stomach. Its cud slobbered out of its mouth and dripped onto my face. I was repulsed, to say the least.

"Hoppy," I pleaded, "this here cattle is crushing me! Do something, please!"

"You bitch," Hoppy said slowly and quietly in utter (or should I say udder?) contempt. "That is <u>not</u> a cattle, that is a cow."

This provoked me to cry out in pain and anguish, "Well, will you just get the mother off of me!"

Hoppy said with a sneer as he started to lead the cow away, "Well, at least you know she's my mother."

It was then that I knew that we should cut down on the amount of children we had planned on.

****

Clarence Reid

SUCH IS LIFE

Tom Madison had just come home from serving in the Korean War. He had been overseas for a year, when it was discovered he had a heart condition, after a routine examination. It was good to be home with family and friends. Home cooking never tasted so good. As he

(continued)

enjoyed the comforts of home, he thought about the army buddies that were left behind. Thinking to himself, "It's time to put army life behind me. I must get on with my life."

As the days passed, his thoughts turned to the opposite sex. Dressed in a new outfit, Tom decided to visit a singles bar. There were many pretty, unescorted girls to choose from, but one in particular caught Tom's eye. She was an attractive, tall, slender girl. Her name was Mary.

Mary had a nice sense of humor and she was also an excellent dancer. Tom loved to dance. "Mary and I have a lot in common," thought Tom. "We should get along quite nicely together." And get along they did!!!

At first they dated each other casually. As time went on, the dates became more frequent. Soon Tom asked Mary to go steady. Tom found himself alling in love with Mary. The next thing he knew, the two of them were at the jewelers, picking out wedding rings.

Mary had not told Tom everything about her past. Now was the time for Tom to learn that she had been married and was now divorced. A son was born and was living with her parents. Her ex-husband had been committed to an insane asylum. It seems Mary's former husband had a problem with alcohol. Everytime Jim got drunk, Mary received a beating. The situation went from bad to worse. Finally, Jim's parents and Mary sought legal and medical assistance. A determination was made that Jim was midically unfit to live in society as a normal person. The courts ordered him incarcerated to a mental institution for rehabilitation. Shortly thereafter, Mary was granted a divorce and custody of the son, Andy.

Tom was not disturbed when learning about Mary's past. However, Mrs. Madison was very upset when told the story. Tom's mother was against the marriage. She could forsee trouble ahead for the young couple. "Mom, once you get to know Mary, your views will change. I may be the first one in the family to marry a divorced person, but that does not mean our marriage will not work," reasoned Tom.

The Christmas holiday season was approaching. Mrs. Madison invited Mary to share Christmas dinner with the family. Mary accepted the invitation graciously, thinking to herself, "I wonder if I will make a favorable impression on the Madison family."

Christmas Day arrived Tom went to Mary's apartment to pick her up. The door opened, and there to his surprise stood a little four-year-old boy. His eyes glistened and he had a big smile on his face. He was dressed in a three-piece suit, white shirt with French cuffs, cuff links, and a red bow tie. Tom looked down and said, "Hi, little man." Andy somewhat annoyed, looked up at Tom, confident in his manner and replied, "I'm not a little man. I'm Andy." Tom and Mary shared a good laugh with each other. Then the three of them journeyed back to Tom's home for dinner with the Madison Family.

The dinner was sumptuous, complete with turkey and all of the trimmings. Dessert and coffee followed. The entire Madison family was impressed with Mary and her son, Andy. Tom was pleased that things had gone so well. Mary and Andy also liked Tom's family.

No wedding date had been set. Being a romantic, Mary wanted a June wedding. Tom had been thinking about a Fall wedding. A compromise was made: the wedding would be July 15th.

Wedding plans for Tom and Mary were proceeding nicely. They would be married in Mary's church. Tom would wear a navy tuxedo and Mary would wear a light blue, street-length, silk dress. Andy would be the ring-bearer, and Tom's niece would be the flower girl. Tom's brother, Len was chosen as best man. Mary had no sisters, so she chose her best girlfriend, Michelle, to be her matron of honor. All details were completed, and the happy young couple impatiently waited for their wedding day to arrive.

Meantime, back at the Madison household, Mr. Madison was getting ready to go on a weekend fishing trip with his son, Len. The fishing gear had been assembled. Mrs. Madison had packed his suitcase very carefully, making sure he had warm clothing for the chilly nights and early mornings. Mr. Madison remembered a few chores that needed attention. He was on his way to the basement, when suddenly Mrs. Madison heard her husband call for help. She ran to him and there, sitting on the basement steps, was her semi-conscious husband, A quick call to the fire department brought the ambulance in record time. At the hospital, the Madison family learned their loved one had suffered a stroke. The prognosis was not good. "He may not live through the night," uttered their family Doctor, Dr. Hensel. The Madison family took turns at the bedside of Mr. Madison. Six hours later, Mr. Madison passed on to the other side.

We must observe a proper mourning period," Tom said to Mary. "Our marriage will have to be postponed."

"I understand," replied Mary.

Mary thought that three months would be an appropriate waiting period, Visions of an October wedding danced in her head. "Tom is going to have a Fall wedding after all," she mused.

Months passed without a definite

(continued)

wedding date being set. Tom was reluctant to talk about it and this puzzled Mary. Eventually, she mustered up the courage to ask Tom. "Why? My mother is alone. She still grieves for my father. I can't leave her now. She needs me," answered Tom. Mary knew if she objected, it would appear she was not sympathetic to Mrs. Madison's situation. "Okay, we will put our wedding plans on the back burner for awhile," said Mary.

Days turned into weeks. Weeks turned into months. Thanksgiving and Christmas came and went. Valentine's Day passed. Still, Tom made no mention of another wedding date. Mary was beginning to wonder to herself if there would be a wedding.

Mother's Day was approaching. "I think it would be nice to take Mom out for dinner on Mothers Day. What do you think, Mary," asked Tom. Mary joyfully agreed. "Splendid. I think that is a good idea."

The second Sunday in May was to be more eventful than Tom and Mary had imagined. Mrs. Madison surprised them as the dinner was ending. "When are you two young people going to set a new wedding date?" Tom smiled at Mary saying "How does July 15th sound, Babe?" After all, that was their original date exactly one year ago. Mary was so stunned, words failed her. She could only smile back at Tom and nod her head in the affirmative.

Again wedding plans were set in motion. The date was changed to July 16th, which was on a Saturday. It was decided all of the details would be the same as originally planned.

Happily, Tom and Mary were married at last. Their wedding day is now a beautiful memory. When July 16th rolls around, Tom and Mary will celebrate their 28th wedding anniversary.

Ah, such is life!!!

****

Sandra Reardon

THE LITERARY SNOB

She knows the right authors and titles.
And quotes the latest best sellers and
classics. And folks, she can tell you
the plots of the plays on Broadway,
--who won the statues and who stayed away.

It's Rosé with the roast beef; sauterne
the trout,
But, it's beer with the bratwurst, and you'll
never find out that she reads the
Enquirer and yellow sheet news.
She knows titles and authors.
She reads the reviews.

****

Jennifer Jones

IF YOU WERE DEAD

If I came home and you were dead,
how sad!
But . . .

The merry-go-round would slow its dizzy
pace,
Gone, tomorrow's expectant hope-dread,
Helpless goodbyes resolved,
Unfulfilled need answered,
All doubts and holy horrors put aside
Straining desire quieted,
Cut loose the gossamer, binding threads,
Time unshared once more my own,
Stress relieved; (once grieve) set free,
No failure to behold,

. . . Yes:
I would be sad,
But more at peace,
If you were dead.

****

Charlotte Pennington

ROSE PLIÉ

Like a skipping stone
that skims and sprays,
she gently cabrioles, jetés,
then softly landing, pirouettes
from pastel-tempered pink palettes,
to Degas' monochrome ballet--
wine arabesque and rose plié.

****

Dave O'Brien

RITUAL

Pacing the rooms
I skulk into the bathroom
Peer into the mirror--a rhyme
I sneer--at a reflection
Whose?
Mine. Mine?
Hands flat on countertop
I lean closer,
Nose to nose; eyes to eyes
I stare unblinking
Mesmerized, enchanted, perplexed
Eyes show no knowledge--instinct
Bestial--like the wolf
Eyes of Satan? Of a god?
Eyes surely once possessed by a child--
still.
Visions withdraw and I smile
Humorous? Possibly perversely
I ponder, grasping
For what?
Nothing, and am satisfied.
Formless, fleeting gestures to a stranger,
Slapping footfalls on tireless floors--
I have gone
Pacing the rooms.

****

Lynette Fields

MR. DONUT

As I walked by the window, he whispered my name. "Come inside," he beckoned. I pressed my nose up against the glass and peered inside. Then, I saw him lying on a piece of delicate white china. He winked his one eye at me and the jelly, oooooh, the delicious, delectable, delightful, dancing jelly oozed out and scribbled my name on the beautiful saucer.

I rushed inside. "I want one just like him," and I pointed to the window display.

Outside, I quickly opened the bag. I picked him up and just as the eye was about to wink, I held him to my mouth, and the jelly, oooooh, the delicious, delectable, delightful, dancing jelly oozed into my mouth and tap-danced on my palate. I bit into him and his passionate moans tinkled my tongue.

****

Eileen Darin

THE FAMILY GATHERING

The usual crowd
sat around the table
telling white lies
whenever able.
The faked laughter
while being fed
but if looks could kill
they'd all be dead.
Such lucrative jobs
such wonderful lives
really a cluster
of frauds in disguise.

****

Debbie Morris

TWO HAIKU

Hurrican of snow
Whitening the world's cover
Howling in the night

****

Solitary one
hundreds of people around
yet standing alone

****

Jeanette L. Gruber

CALLUSES

Twenty-one thousand murders in only
fifteen years
have assaulted your eyes and ears.
They grow tougher, thicker . . .
a ripped-out eyeball, blood curdling
on the street grating,
the piercing look well-suited to the
gnarly knife handled in
assassination.
I cringe, shiver, retch, no calluses to
shield me.
You watch, blind to drama horror,
calluses to feeling in place.
"Pain! Don't you see it! Can't you
feel it!"
The screen has inundated you with its
stabbing reality.
The calluses are in place. "Pain!"
is mere drama.
"Will your callused senses believe you
next time,
when it's my brother who lays at the
grate?"

Turn the other way and pass.

Calluses cure caring.

****

Vickie Carmichael

HANSON'S HAT

Large. It was large and roomy. Large, to fit Hanson's head. It was made of beaver fur, felt-like, only more durable. The stetson style had been modified, personalized. It wasn't just a hat anymore, it was his hat. The two ridges on top had been flattened out so the indentation between them was less pronounced. Encircling the hat was a wide band, beaded with turquoise and mother-of-pearl in an Indian design. It was said, in shispers, that the band was an old Indian medicine band, and there was power in it . . . great power. Fitted into the right side of the hat, nestled in the band, were three small feathers. An eagle, a crow, and a vulture. They said he had caught them, plucked a single feather and released each. But then they said a lot of things about Hanson.

The hat lay on the bed. Lifeless yet alive somehow. Something that was such a vital part of such a man almost seemed to take on that man's persona. It became an extension of him. The life of the man gave life to the object.

(continued)

He would not be the same man without it, and without it he seemed incomplete. The hat radiated the strength and self-assurance that was indicative of its owner. Full of living, both good and bad. Ready to meet all challenges and face all quests. The hat now stood empty, without purpose.

How is it some have such power and others seem so powerless? Is it by accident? Does it happen by some divine notion? Do the gods touch one and shun others? Such people . . . such power . . Hanson. Was it a blessing or a curse? Was it by choice or preordination? Did Hanson choose his life, or was his path already marked for him? One could not say for sure. Yet, knowing Hanson, one knew . . .

The brim of the hat turned down front and back. The front pulled low, so that even when it was cocked back on the head, it still covered the eyes. There was a distance created. Shading. Shadows. Unapproachable. Maybe that added to the mystique. Chosen or not, the effect was still the same--mystery.

Was he aware? Sure he must be. People felt things, even Hanson. Assuredly he must know. How could he not know? They knew. They all knew. He was different. As if he'd come from another time. A sorcerer. A powerful, willful wizard. Tempter and tempting. There was the real danger. Certainly he knew, yet he chose to change nothing, to modify nothing, to be what he was. Without question . . . true to his nature. Fulfilling his destiny.

They talked about him, huddled together closely, as if needing protection, even now. Yes, they talked about him. He had been the center of their world since he'd arrived. Where had he come from? No one knew and none dared to ask. They were afraid. Paralyzed. Immobile. Until one day somehow the winds of fate had changed. Seeing their chance . . . they took action. Seizing the moment they thought would never come. Knowing that one mistake would bring destruction on all. Yet they acted. Were they right? Did Hanson represent the evil they felt so strongly? Or was it only their own reflections of returning off this man? Hard. Strong. Unyielding. Was it possible to see into this man, or was the image only an echo reversing the signals as sent?

Hanson's hat sat there on the bed waiting, as they also waited. Not knowing. Fearing. Unable to change the course to which they were now unalterably committed. Was fear of the unknown greater than the clear and present danger that gripped them now? No, the act, the fear would go on in the ordered steps inscribed by the gods. There was no turning back now.

They gathered, watching, waiting, barely breathing. Others near . . . not alone. There was strength in numbers. Each ready to do their part. Each knowing they could change the outcome. They had the power bestowed upon them. For the first time, theirs was the potency, the will. Or was it? What was power if not used? What became of it? Did it stay nearby, or was it gone? Could it be summoned to do the bidding? Would one of them use it, or would the fear that gnawed at their bellies and slithered up their spines, would that fear rule. Demand. Elate. Triumph.

Each was called and in turn did as the one before him. Some thought they would feel lighter, relieved of their granite burden, but there was no relief. Only a shifting of the oppressive weight from their hands to their hearts. Stone. Cold. Gruesome. Some tried to summon up their inner voice. That feeling they were sure would come. The conviction that they were acting out of righteousness, not fear. But after their part in the exploit was done, there was no virtuous elation, just shame and mockery. Still none dared to act, to change the design.

Each waited, not knowing whether the others before him had done their deed or passed without releasing their encumbrance. Even afterward, no one knew whether the devastation would be complete or fall short. Would the sentence be carried out?

Here was the last, the last person. Had it been decided? Would it be changed? Moving slowly toward his fate, he lowered his hand into the bucket and withdrew it. Taking steps backward, trying to blend into the crowd he watched. They watched. Soon they would know. The bucket was freed and for a second all breathing stopped. All movement ceased . . . purgatory. Then it moved, slowly. It dipped down on its journey to infinity. The decision was made. Irrevocably. It was done.

Hanson was gone, destroyed. Inside behind the bars, on the bed, Hanson's hat sat waiting, as if in anticipation of that which would be no more. They feared it as they had feared Hanson. So there it lay until he was plotted in the earth. They were safe now. He was gone.

They burned it. Three days later they burned Hanson's hat.

****

Judy Belfield

ALWAYS AMONG US

Schizophrenic boy,
in a state institution
for sixteen years,
comes home on Fridays,
stays til Sunday night.
Sandy-haired boy says,
"Momma left long ago--
went to Las Vegas,
or someplace."
He smiles, empty-eyed.

Father, one-legged,
gets around on crutches,
lives on welfare,
old, white-haired,
gentle-faced, soft-voiced,
waits for weekends
to be with his son.

After they kiss goodbye,
he asks God,
"Who's gonna love him
when I'm gone?"

****

Robert "Gap" Webb

I AINT GOT THE TIME

I aint got the time
I aint got the nergy
To be wasting my valuable time
On some unnecessary poor butt jive

I mean, it doesn't make any sense
For me to get involved
The last time I did, I lost
More than I gained
The conflicting problems I encountered
Are still far from being solved
in need of an immediate solution.
My intelligence was so abused
I thought of being mentally maimed
So you see, I just aint got the time
I'm steadily trying to keep a dime
Even my woman cracked on me
"If you want the honey
Give up the money
If you want to play
You've got to pay
If you want to be with me
You've got to finance the fee
I'll check you out later, cause I
Just aint got the time.

****

Debbie Morris

HAIKU

Sunshine slowly fades
shadows growing long and thin
black as ink of night

****

Susan Zupancic

DIARY ENTRY

September 29, 1982 New York City, New York

On this day I was told, not so politely (Judy had a horrible way with words), to leave the Goldberg's humble upper East-side condo. "Go out and do SOMETHING for about three or four hours." The Goldbergs were having company. I guess they did not want their guests to know they were housing a Protestant in their daughter's bedroom. It was a Jewish holiday of some sort, so I took that opportunity to check out a movie I'd been planning to see--The World According to Garp.

I had just finished the book a few days before. I'd been told the movie made more sense if you read the novel first. I LOVED the book. It proved to be a great source of inspiration for writing, and was off-the-wall enough to keep my attention. Finally, seeing the film fulfilled my visual curiosity. I had certain images of each character. The casting was an exceptional representation of those images. The whole two-and-a-half hours in my theatre seat were extremely pleasurable; well worth the five-spot. But as I left the theatre, I felt Garp's "undertoad" approaching.

On the corner, uptown from the theatre, there were ambulances and gawking people. Everyone was looking up.

I've always looked down on people who enjoy seeing others' miseries. You know--similar to the kids in the old neighborhood wanting to follow the fire trucks. One day I rushed inside to tell Mom that I was going to hop on my bike and follow those big red trucks.

"No you're not."

"But WHY Mom?!"

"Do you really want to see others' problems and misfortunes?"

I haven't ever wanted to since then. She made a long-lasting impact. She also hates being referred to as "she." Sorry Mom.

****

Tom Van Horn

IN CONGRESS

Most members of our legislative branch
spend too little time in their seats or houses.
Most are pork-barreling or special interesting.
When elected by those who vote
they're sent to Washington, D. C.
and then, they are incongruous.

****

Stacy Biedermann

MY MAILBOX TALKS

Write me a letter
I'm hungry as hell.
Stuff me with envelopes
and I'll soon feel well.
Pull my arm up,
open my door.
Use me, people!
What do you think I'm for?

****

Judy Belfield

AN ABBREVIATED VISIT WITH ANOTHER RENEGADE

I died yesterday--again. Passed over to the other side. Didn't see any bright, white light. Didn't hear any heavenly music. Mother wasn't "spectin me." Father wasn't "waitin"--only maggots yelling, "Hold still, hold still!" So I came back again--here, where I can talk to something more than bugs and the dark.

I was out in that desert a long time. Almost fried me, and that's a fact. After awhile, though, it got to be a contest between me and the sun--who could beat who--you know? But when the moon started to shine up there in the cool, black sky, why . . . that was heaven. Yes. At night, the air was so cool, so fresh, so sweet, I could lick it. Yes. The more I think of it, the more convinced I am--that was heaven.

But the daytime, the dry, dry throat in the daytime, when the sand sparkles. And way off--because your eyes play tricks--the sand shimmers like a great ochre ocean, lazy tan water rippling ever so slightly. But you can't get to it. You never reach it. It keeps gliding out and away, further and further. And you know you're not going to get to it, but you keep trying. You keep walking, even though your clothes are soaked with sweat, and you're tired, and you're baking . . . baking . . .

Your feet burn, your muscles ache. Later on, when the sun gets high, you take some clothes off and wipe them across your skin. But they're as hot as you are, and there's no comfort. When the thirst gets really bad, when your lips crack and your windpipe thickens, you even try to suck the sweat from your shirt. But you don't get anything. And you keep moving, not getting anywhere . . .

Then the sun sets. You in your skin, which flames when you touch it cause you never should have taken off your shirt, I don't care how tanned you are, your hot skin feels a slight-slight--breeze. And that's the beginning of heaven. The darkness . . . cool and delicious . . . better than the juiciest pear that ever dribbled down your chin . . .

But now I'm here. I came back to tell you about the desert, but it seem to fade. It fades, here in the darkness, and I can hardly remember what it was like any more. Catch the few, quick memories now--before I forget altogether.

I died yesterday. Yes. But there wasn't any light. None. It was dark . . like here. Except, there wasn't anybody to talk to. It was lonely. B not like the desert. There, I had something to reach for--even though I was never going to reach it. I forget what it was. I forget . . . now.

So, I came back. Here. To you. To talk.

Could you, maybe, turn on that li so I can see what's crawling on my arm What? The light. It's over there somplace--I forget exactly where.

Itchy . . . itchy. Can't you fin the light? Crawly. Could you speak u What's that? Eh? Could you speak up--just a little? Something seems to be my ears. Itchy . . . crawly. Come clo ser. I can't hear you.

Can't find me in the dark? Follow the sound of my voice . . . TRY! Here! This way! This--errragh! They're in my--agggh!

Gra . . .

****

Jean Tyrell

WRITER'S LAMENT

I've no more paper in the house.
Writing's turned me into a grouse.
Friends don't call me on the phone.
It's better, then I'll be alone.

For shards of paper hear my words,
Like ancient friends, still deterred.
It hides beneath this mess of mine,
Poetry, in need of rhyme.

****

Anita Rutkowski

THE END OF DEVOTION?

As I near the tree
where we carved our devotion,
the snow reflected sunlight has
blinded my mind's picture of you.
A tired breeze prompts our tree
to whistle gently.

As I stand by the edge of the lake,
my mind crushes its icy covering
and lures its summer memories
to surface.
The sharp caw of a winter bird
distracts me from my thoughts.

Lifting my head to the crisp, cool air,
I can't remember what I was thinking.
Something soft and warm brushes against
my cheek, and it evokes a sob from
deep inside of me. With it comes the
reemergence of my thoughts . . .
If my memories come back, why can't you?

****

Clarence Reid

THE BOTTLE

As I stood upon the shore
And looked across the sea
I saw a small dark bottle
Come floating in toward me.

I waded out to get it
To see if it contained
A note or something foreign
Excitement was ingrained.

As I twisted off the cork
There was a tell-tale stink
As you've doubtless guessed by now
It was full of India ink.

****

C. L. Weatherford

REFLECTIONS

I looked into the river
To see what I might see,
And the stranges thing I saw.
I saw what looked like me!

There was a man with a beard
And grey-green eyes.
No wrinkles he had,
Yet his face seemed wise.

He had grey at the temple,
And a smile on his lips,
As if he knew life
Were at his fingertips.

Not only that
But a tear in his eye.
Yes, yes,
I saw this grown man cry.

I took a closer look.
He fell off his bank!
No joy overcame me
As he unwillingly sank.

****

Pat Roemer

PROSPECTIVE CHILD

pretty, so sweet
jasper and teak
a revery,
a jubilee,
so frail,
she lies still, quietly
rooting for life.
odds are against this
little willow.
is there strength enough
to match our needs
precious babe?
a rise of breast, such
as to hear a breathless
. . . . . hu hu.
I bend to kiss and
whisper hush . . .
. . . hush
I
Love
You.

****

Paul Houser

JOGGING

Journeying
Out to
Get a
Gruesome pain that
Increases with each
Nagging
Gate

****

Sandra Reardon

RAPE

Pain talks over the phone, gently,
with soft background music. It
informs: "If you go to work today
terrible things happen to
your family," and, "Your daughter
is in Tennessee. Come and get
her," and "Carmen died this morning-"
Then it penetrates.
Pain sits in the big soft Morris
chair in the living room, wearing
my mother's blue wool dress and
emanating the fragrance of the
cologne I gave her for Christmas.
It says, casually, "Your father
doesn't live here anymore."
Then it pierces.
Pain walks the streets, wearing
denim jeans and jacket, hiding
behind a pleasant boyish smile.
In inquires, innocently, "Does the
bus stop at the next corner?"
Then it violates.

****

Dave O'Brien

THE DRUMMER'S HANDS

Freshly shaven heads
And animal breath
The warrior children
March to the beat of death drums,
The cadence rolls;
Wise patriarchs,
The drummer's hands

****

Stacy Biedermann

I LUV FOOD!

I look in the mirror
and what do I see?
Dimply cellulite
all over me.
The wiggly, jiggly fat
on my thighs
is extremely ugly
and does not attract guys.
The fat on my butt
has a tendency to wiggle,
and people that look
always giggle.
These lumps, bumps, and bulges
are driving me insane.
How can I diet
without any pain?
I've tried to diet
but I get hunger attacks
and find myself at McDonalds
eating five Big Macs.

****

Charlotte Pennington

LIKE THE WIND

Like the wind through the trees,
you move with such ease.
Perfection speaks through every notion
the way you smile
is expressed with such style!
And your eyes speak out every emotion.

You're so near, yet so far--
like the great Northern Star
whose light shimmers on
through the darkness.

Though you'll never be mine
I can dream to pass time and help
soften reality's starkness.

****

Jennifer Jones

MONSTERS

Fears, and other Black Things
hide in dark places . . .
Be careful when you open a closet door,
or enter a lightless room . . .
And don't dare leave your arm dangle
over the side of the bed as you sleep . .

Panting struggles with deadly sheets
during sleep.
Throttle the pillow lying in
menacing wait.
Panic upon waking.

Relief blossoms:
a velvety magenta rose of calm,
a hastily flicked lightswitch
floods a cold room
with waves of golden light,
causing every reflective object
to glitter responsively--
Succour from fear's doorstep.

****

Eileen Darin

THE SUMMER SUN

The summer sun, blazing bright
   Seagulls soaring in their flight
Couples walking near the lake
   Leaving ffotprints in their wake.

Bathing in the summer heat
   Kicking sand between my feet
Hearing children's playful yells
   Watching others look for shells.

Sleeping on a golden beach
   All my worries out of reach
Waking to the call of friends
   Just before the sun's day ends.

****

Susan Zupancic

IN THE MIDST OF PUERTO RICAN VEGETARIANS

Surrounded by 6 white
walls
an adjoining bathroom
leading
to whom we do not know

dark blue curtains
and no light bulbs
in the fixtures

open to the seasons all
year round
only screens for windows
that
supposedly
keep the biting insects out

in addition of all of the above
artificial aire
cold
pushing hot
out
where it belongs
so we can close the door
on the Puerto Rican vegetarians

Adios!

****

Tom Van Horn

CHARLEY BROWN

I knew. I didn't like to think about it. Charley Brown knew I was aware. My wife didn't recognize any of the signs as being meaningful and I declined to discuss the matter with her. I'd hoped she'd become a little more tolerant of his ways. She didn't. I considered taking some vacation time to spend more hours with Charley. I didn't.

The visits to the vet, became more and more frequent as July became August. His doctor did everything possible. However, by mid-August, Charley's tumor had grown too large. The insulin shots for his diabetes were painful for both dog and master. And Charley Brown's epileptic seizures seemed more persistent.

Near Labor Day, some very unwelcome guests came. Severe and constant thunder storms made their stay well known. For almost a week, they lingered with manacing friends--high winds and lightning. The poor dog had always been afraid of bad weather. His condition and the severity of the storms made it all much worse.

On the thrid day of September, it began to storm about 10 p.m. By midnight, I had turned on the bedroom light to lessen the frightening effect of the uncompromising lightning. The loud and constant pelting of wind-blown rain on the windows and the deafening explosions

Judy Belfield

PRINCESS DOE

Her body was dumped
in a spot where high weeds grew
and choked the grass.
She was found weeks later--
too much later to tell who she was-
The cop in charge
named her Princess Doe:
"Jane" was too easy to forget.
Months passed--
the dead girl remained a mystery.

People in the town
thought she should be put to rest.
They bought a plot
arranged services
brought flowers
cried.

Somebody's princess again.

****

Robert "Gap" Webb

AGE

We tend to fear old age
as some sort of disorder that can be
cured
with the proper brand of aspirin
or perhaps a bit of Ben-Gay for the
shoulders
It does of course pay to advertise

One hates the idea of the first gray
hair
a shortness of breath
devastating blows to the ego
indications we are doing
what comes naturally

****

of thunder were even beginning to cause me some concern. Charley was totally incapable of coping. I conjectured this was God's way of calling for my companion. If so, it was cruel.

From my arms, to the floor, to the foot of the bed, to an impossible scramble to hide under the bed . . . from crying to whimpering, from eyes and mind glazed with fear, from pain to fatigue to frustration, from a desperate need for attention and comfort to the instinct to hide or run away, it was an execrable night of despair. The deluge hurled unrelentingly. Finally, at some a.m., exhausted and overwhelmed, Charley found sleep. I cried.

The next morning's trip to the vet was marked by an overpowering silence. Charley Brown's usual incessant

(continued)

barking was not to be. He was traveling his last mile in dignity. A twelve-year, eternal love affair was about to end. I desperately held back my tears as I parked the car. Our eyes met. I think we both knew this would be our last, precious, private moment together. I wanted to tell him how sorry I was for every time I'd been less than understanding of tolerant. The dog's devotional gaze convinced me that he understood. He had always dreaded kisses but allowed this last one to reach his nose.

I fought the inevitable tears throughout the work day. That night, I fought no more.

My job suffered as all thoughts were reminiscenses of our joyous years together. From the moment we met, there was a mutual adoration. Over the years, I learned to communicate without the use of words. A simple gesture by Charley brought my instant response and vice-versa.

Never one for fondling or affection, he was nonetheless, genuinely and unselfishly loving. He helped to fulfill my life. I didn't want to let him go. Selfishly, I wanted at least one more long walk in the woods with my friend. I wanted to tell him a million things. I wanted to love him and be loved by him.

September 7 was to be Charley Brown's last day on earth. I had to make the call. The doctor offered his professional advice: "The best thing we can do for old Charley Brown is to put him to sleep."

My voice cracked as I agreed. I had to play God.

For several weeks, I walked the same paths we'd once taken so gleefully. Each time, I cried a little less. My life will never be the same. A part of me died with Charley Brown.

****

Anita Rutkowski

ALONE

You left me here, alone,
so you could start your ascent.
You climbed too fast,
hardly anyone could see you.
I did.
I sat for days, weeks, months
watching you stumble
take small spills,
and get hurt.
You kept on climbing and
didn't look down at me.
A few passerbys would
glance at you, be with you, then leave.
I stayed.
I'm still down here, alone,
and it's getting hard to see you,
but I strain my eyes and
your image comes to me.
You're moving fast--very fast,
and no one is with you now.
No one but me.
You've lost your footage and you're falling
but in your quick descent you think of me--
waiting for you--and you know you
will survive.
You hit the ground and look for me
but I am not around.

****

Jennifer Jones

LOOK AT ME

I am flaming Red,
cold ultramarine Blue,
warm sunwashed Gold,
S-eking a similar wild intensity
in a sullen, grey universe.

****

Charlotte Pennington

UNTITLED

Part I
Part of me is on paper
Part of me stays on your mind
Part of me turns into vapor
Partly cloudy--most of the time
Part II
Part of me is unending
Part of me delves into time
Part of me is remembering
What goes on in that part
of my mind
Part III

For ages and ages
and through the torn pages
Part of me stays on your mind.

****

Susan Zupancic

UNTITLED

Coffee--oh the sweet smell of . . CAFFEINE!!!

I think I could actually drink the stuff all day long. At night--just when I think I'm fally peacefully asleep, a giant Mr. Coffee maker starts brewing. The tantalizing, rich, Java smells linger under my dozing olfacotory organ; whispering, "Awaken, awaken, my slumbering victim. Come here and taste this delicious brew." Of course, I wake up and drink "the WHOLE THING". Up all night, I realize what a stupid cunt I am for taking that stimulant at such a late hour. POOF! Oh, thank god, it was just a dream. A whiff of coffee probably blew in the window form the diner downstairs.

****

Eileen Darin

EYES

His eyes pierce me
reading from head
t
o
toe
my thoughts
my feelings
leaving nothing untouched
born blue
chameleon in nature
his eyes adjust to the situation
intelligence and strength are seen in him
confidence abounds

why me?
why do my eyes remain open
for him to enter
am I so naive
or only trusting

if I close them
would he leave
do I want him to go
another day
for now he is mine.

****

Jennifer Jones

PEOPLE

A teeming, writhing, sweaty mass
of humid stench . ...
Loud human ignorance swelling to a
horrible crescendo
in the scope of my sight,
I am sickened and repulsed--
they invade my space, my world . . .
insensate beings, swine, self-fulfilling.
Grunting in self-righteous glo-y,
wallowing in each others' passionless sweat,
mouths full of empty promises,
shallow laughter,
Shouting, Wanting, Demanding.
The pulsing, throbbing crowd mingles
with the scenery
of gaudy advertisements . . .
screaming for attention in chorus:
melding to form a horrible kaleidoscope.

In sadness, I am earthbound.

****

Jean Tyrell

MOTO-LASSIE

Wind tousels her hair
A collie on a Harley seat
Behind her owner.

****

Judy Belfield

THE MORE THINGS CHANGE

They watched us
clean their closets,
tossing out useless yesterdays,
burning their flags,
heaping dusty morals
into the trash.
Our young minds
thrashed in cobwebbed corners,
found hypocrisy,
intolerance,
inhumanity.
These, we discarded also.

They watched us,
horror creeping through their bones,
outrage coursing in their veins.
We tried to talk.
They laughed.
We screamed in the streets.

One day, they listened . . .
one day, a long time ago--
before we built closets of our own.

****

Susan Zupancic

HERE WE ARE AGAIN

Here we are again--flying through the infinite number of air molecules. Lower O_2 though, on the way to Colorado--home home where all the animals roam. Forest & Field & Open Stream. A place where one can build a dream-city--called DENVER. So much cement (you just go crazy), nothing to do (you just get lazy)--layin' around in a hotel room.

****

Tom Van Horn

ON MY WIFE

My wife possesses an unusual talent. I guess we all have one. Some can juggle oranges while whistling. Some can hop on one foot while rubbing their head and patting their stomach. I think her skill champions all. I've wondered often if I shouldn't inform Guinness.

I'm not sure my wife's ability is unique to her. Some other person might be capable of the same feat. I, however, would doubt it. I don't think my wife was taught. I don't believe she's read about it. When we were first married, she couldn't or didn't do it. I can't recall the exact date it began. I do know she's been doing it now for several years.

Althought she excels at what she does, she performs only for me. In addition to the difficulty factor, my wife

(continued)

must perform only at a precise time. She does it only in bed. Only at night. Not every night. Just some. We don't know what prompts her. She's even performed for me in hotels both here and abroad. None of our children have inherited her skill. Perhaps, because they're all males. Can only females do it?

Every night, in bed, my wife initially lies on her stomach. There is no force in this universe powerful enough to change this habit. We both tell the dog goodnight. Next, we say goodnight to each other. It's at this point I'm sometimes fearful. Will this be one of her performance nights? Never knowing exactly when it will happen can be brutal.

My wife has never bragged about it. In fact, she's denied having done the thing. I know she does it. I have no documented proof. Only on those nights it occurs, I wish someone else could be in our bedroom. Be there, just to confirm what my wife is capable of doing. On those nights, at the exact time I begin to fall asleep, my wife turns over. Her timing amazes me. The act of turning one's body from lying on the stomach to lying on the back seems rather simple. It probably is in millions of bedrooms. Nor, should this basic maneuver require any special comment. My wife's method does.

She is able to raise her entire body some twelves inches off the bed. She then rotates her body remaining supine. As if she were levitating. Her body thrust moves the mattress enough to awaken me. Usually, there would be no problem. I should be back to sleep in a matter of moments. However, for an interminable time, my wife can remain suspended in air. It's as if only one shoe had dropped. I know she eventually has to fall. When? This is her coup de grace. She waits until I'm back to the part where I'm just about asleep. Her precision is masterful. At that exact moment, she falls. Now on her back. Once again, I'm awakened.

As quickly as I can make words from angry thoughts, I begin to scold her. By my second word, I stop. By this time, she's always snoring. Her performance curtails my snoring time for hours. I wonder if some night she'll be capable of reversing the act. God, I hope not.

****

Eileen Darin

BLACK BALL

triangle points to me
position my smooth stick
between slickened fingers
solid shape disperses
now fifteen equal spheres
one by one
disappearing
into the dark receptacles
of their hiding
'til the lone one remains
now pitted against each
head to head
he aims
miss
I aim
miss
again he fails
anticipation swells
concentration is key
steadfast glares
at varying angles
decision made
action taken
my eyes
catch the black dropping
into my desired corner
I win!

****

Judy Belfield

PERSISTENCE

Each second a forever--
a Faulkner sentence
now and then a comma,
a teasing breeze
promising the end:
Relief with nightfall
when the songs of cicadas
in the black-leafed trees
blend with the cool, cool dusk . . .

but for now
endure.

****

Paul Houser

DOG

Digging
Out
Garden

****

Stacy Biedermann

THE BUS RIDE

These seats are so uncomfortable. I don't think I've ever ridden on a plane, train, or bus without being uncomfortable. It wouldn't be half as bad if Mr. Big wasn't sitting right next to me. Not only is this guy big, but he smells bad and is sucking on a cigar that looks like it went through both wars.

(continued

The Bus Ride, continued

Maybe he'll get off at the next stop . . . I hope so. Let's see, I get off at Greencastle, so my luck, he'll get off there also.

I wonder if this guy is some sicko. He's wearing these gay sunglasses, and his beady eyes behind the glasses are darting all over the place. I wonder what he's thinking. I wonder if he's thinking what I'm thinking, or if he knows I'm thinking about him.

Here goes. I'm dying to hear his voice.

"So, uh, where you headed to?"

With the highest soprano voice I have ever heard, this guy said, "Greencastle, and how about you, little lady?"

I turned, looked away, and said in a low and uninterested voice, "Greencastle." What luck. The stench is staying with me the whole ride.

"Little Lady, what's your name?"

"Um, I'm Lucy," I said.

"I have a niece Lucy," said the fatty.

"Oh really," I said, not really paying attention.

"She hasn't seen me since she was about three. I should say, I haven't seen her since she was three."

"Hmmm, why not?" I asked.

"Well, she and her mother left Jimmysville when she was very young, and moved to the other side of the world it seems."

By this time of the conversation, I paid close attention. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. This fat guy smoking a musty old cigar was my long-lost Uncle Blimpola.

"Uncle Blimpola," I said very lightly.

"Lucy . . . Lucy, um, Dresdon. Is that you?"

"Yes, Uncle . . . it's me." As I talked, I thought to myself how I'd give anything to get off the bus at the next stop and let Uncle Blimpola stink himself to death on that damn bus.

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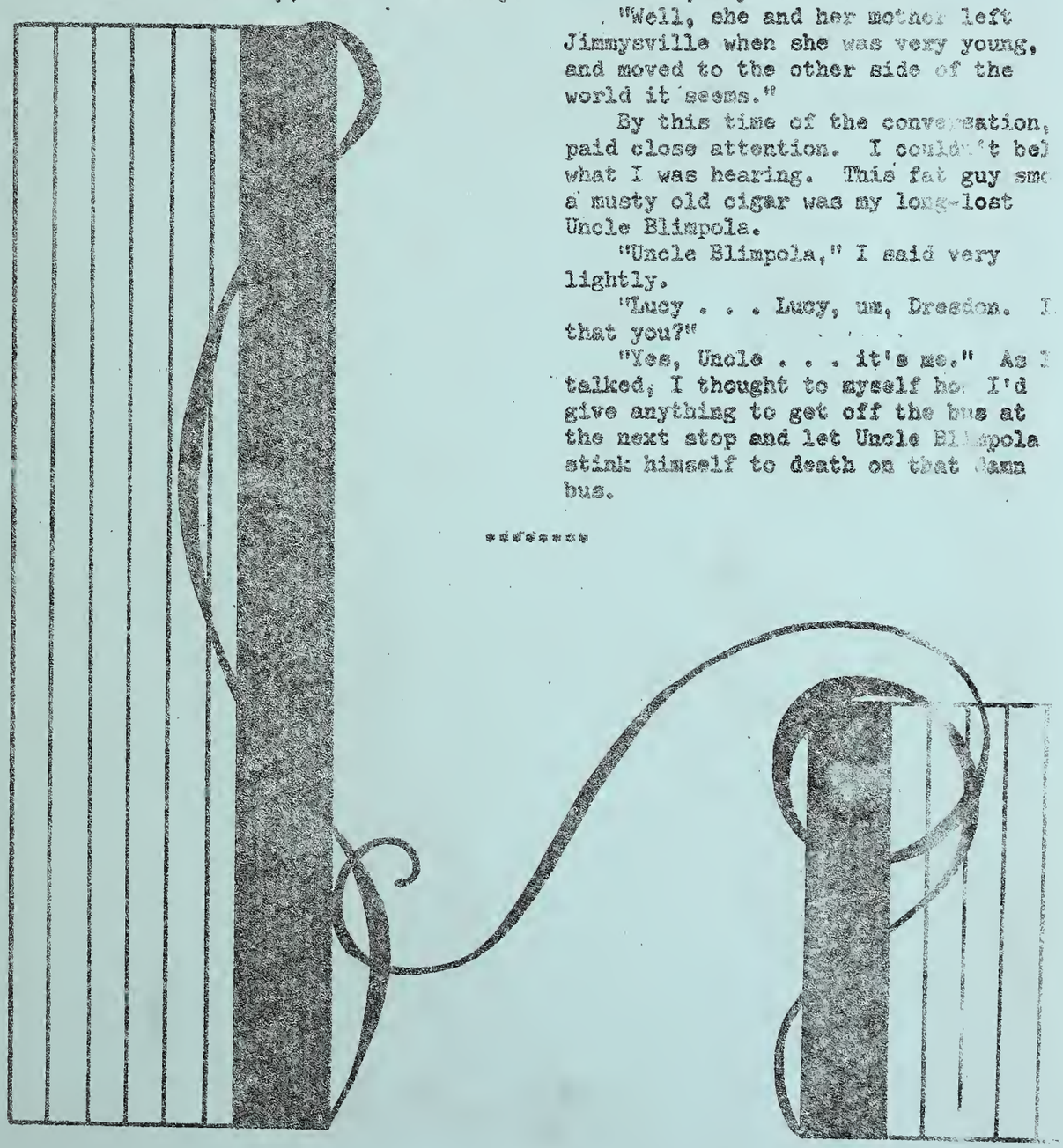

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JENNIFER JONES